

THE MOTH



WILLIAM DANA ORCUTT









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BOOKS BY
WILLIAM DANA ORCUTT

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"**L**OVE IS BUT A PART OF LIFE, ONLY
A PART, AND I WANT IT ALL!
SEE—I LOVE YOU EVERY ONE!"

THE MOTH

A NOVEL

BY
WILLIAM DANA ORCUTT

AUTHOR OF "THE LEVER," "THE SPELL,"
"THE FLOWER OF DESTINY," ETC.



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TO MY SISTERS
M. F. G., L. A. O. W. AND H. W. O.
IN AFFECTION

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I

MRS. SPENCER is in the library," the butler told Cunningham, as he was relieved of his hat and cane; and with a familiarity which bespoke intimacy with the house and its inmates the caller immediately turned to the stairway leading to the second floor. He was late in dropping in at the Spencers' for tea, but as this was the direct result of the suggestion made by his hostess over the telephone, it had not occurred to him that he would find her still entertaining friends. The sound of voices interspersed with laughter told him of his mistake even before he stood at the door, looking in on the animated scene.

"Miller, Hayden, Reed, Langdon, Clapp — five men and not a woman in sight except our charming hostess," Cunningham counted with finger upraised. "Dare I enter and still further overbalance the situation?"

"Come on in," Langdon insisted, before Mrs. Spencer could greet him; "six to one is only a fair division with Lucy on the other side. She is running us for fair today."

"You know that they're maligning me, don't you, Ned?" she protested to the newcomer as he approached

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the tea-table behind which she was ensconced. "I've simply tried to defend myself."

"But where *are* the women?" Cunningham inquired laughingly, accepting the cup she offered him. "If the men are taking to tea-tasting, what is left for our poor wives and sisters to consider as their prerogative?"

"The place has been simply cluttered up with women," Hayden explained, "and we've had to sit them out in order to have this cosy time with Lucy."

"Don't think for a minute that we've had her to ourselves all the afternoon," corroborated Miller; "that would be too much luck."

Mrs. Spencer laughed happily. "You see you're all wrong again, Ned. This is my last day at home before going to the shore, and we have had a beautiful party. Haven't we, Bertie?"

Clapp was delighted to find himself appealed to: "Too many women, as a matter of fact," he replied gravely. "It's much nicer now."

"But it is because you all are so good to me that the women do come," Lucy explained. "After being bored to death at other teas where they can visit only with one another, they flock here to have a really good time with you."

"We have to be civil to them," Archie Reed ventured, apologetically.

"Of course," Lucy laughed again; "but you didn't find it very difficult to be civil to Miss Stanhope, now did you?"

"Well" — Archie hesitated — "not too difficult. She is a pleasing little party, isn't she? I'm glad you've added her to your collection."

"Boys," Langdon exclaimed suddenly, "this endurance test ought to be brought to a close by mutual consent."

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Evidently no one of us is magnanimous enough to leave the field to the others, so I move that we all go together."

"But I've only just come," Cunningham protested.

"That is what has spoiled the combination," Miller explained. "We all had an equal start, so no one could complain; but now what Langdon calls an endurance test has become a relay. We won't be grabby-minded, Ned; but we do hate to leave you here."

"I appreciate your generosity, — especially as it is getting so near dinner time that I shall have to follow close in your footsteps."

Lucy rose as the men started to go. "I shall count on seeing you often this summer," she said to Langdon. "You won't desert me just because I'm at the shore, will you?"

"By no means, — but I can't ask you to motor with me because I'm going to give up my car."

"Give up your car?" she echoed, surprised.

"Yes; I'm going to economize this summer."

"Don't do it," Lucy advised seriously; "there's nothing in it. You'll simply be going without something you really want for fear that some time in the future you may want something which when the time comes you probably won't want."

"That is a perfect definition," laughed Hayden. "I become a spendthrift from this moment, and shall turn to you for justification."

"You'll come down to see me too, won't you?" Lucy continued, turning to Miller.

"I'm sure to," he replied. "It's such a relief to get away from the queer nice people."

"That isn't a kind remark at all," she chided him. "If I were old Dame Boston I would box your ears!"

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When Vallie decided to come here from New York I shivered all over, and it is just these silly jokes cracked by its own people at its expense which give the city its icy reputation. Now, I love it, and so do you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I am," Miller admitted with proper humility. "It's a habit we fall into."

"It's worse than a habit," Lucy corrected, — "it's an affectation. I notice you don't let any one from outside knock the little old town."

"I've just got a car," Archie Reed interrupted, as he brought up in the rear, looking triumphantly at Langdon, "and it didn't cost me a cent."

"Did you steal it?" asked Miller.

"No," was the resentful response. "I put a \$2,500 mortgage on the house, and then mortgaged the machine for the balance. Pretty clever, wasn't it?"

"Archie, you're a born financier!" Lucy complimented him. — "Now, remember, I count on every one of you to keep my summer from being stupid."

"That could never be," Clapp insisted as he moved toward the stairs with the others. "You'd make a desert look like the Arnold Arboretum."

"I'm counting on all of you," she repeated gaily, bidding the last goodbye; "see that you fail me not!"

As the men disappeared Lucy and Cunningham turned back to the library. "I knew you wouldn't disappoint me," she said; "you never do."

"When a lady says she must see me, there is no alternative, is there?"

"Then you came today as a matter of duty?"

"Rather let us say — gallantry," he corrected lightly, "to which was added a desire to see you again before you

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leave town, and to express those commonplace platitudes for the summer which in this case happen to be genuinely sincere. When do you leave?"

"Thursday," she replied quietly, settling into a contemplative silence.

"So soon?" he queried. "Then I am just in time. Where's Vallie?"

"Vallie?" she echoed, recovering from her momentary introspection, and with returning vivacity; "you surely didn't expect to find him here, — let me pour you some more tea. — Vallie, I have no doubt, is playing auction at the Badminton Club, where he'll stay until his luck is bad, which will remind him of home. But I don't want to talk about Vallie now, — so here's wishing him nothing but no-trump hands."

Cunningham smiled. "Still the spoiled child," he said. "If I were Vallie I should be in a quandary to know whether to starve you into behaving like a rational wife and mother, or to try beating."

It was Lucy Spencer's turn to laugh. "You as a wife-beater!" she exclaimed. "Why, Ned, one of your chief recommendations is the sweet way you let Margaret wind you about her little finger. Surely you know that."

"Indeed!" Cunningham arched his eyebrows. "If I have convinced Margaret and her friends of this, then I have proved myself a diplomat."

"You hypocrite!" she cried gaily, "even to try to explain away what everybody knows!"

"Oh, well." Cunningham appeared resigned. "A man with a good disposition is always doomed to misinterpretation. I admit that I always yield on immaterials —"

"And on the material things, too," she laughed. "But don't think I'm objecting; it's splendid."

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"You forget that Peggy is an ideal wife," he protested, teasingly.

Lucy pouted. "In which respect you congratulate yourself that you have the advantage over Vallie?"

"Now we're even," Cunningham declared triumphantly. "But you surely didn't telephone me so peremptorily to come here this afternoon merely to discuss the comparative merits of wives? What was the 'serious matter' you wanted to talk over with me?"

"Did I say it was serious?"

Cunningham looked up quickly. "If you've forgotten already it couldn't have been of much consequence."

"Yes it was," she hastened to insist. "First of all, I wanted to have a last little visit with you, and then I wanted to tell you when we were going down to Beverly Farms."

"What is so serious in all that?"

"I'm going to miss you horribly," she said frankly.

Cunningham put his cup down abruptly on the table beside him.

"Of course, I mean you and Margaret," she added quickly. "Why can't you take a house down there near us?"

"First of all because Peggy doesn't care for the North Shore, secondly because houses can't be picked up at a moment's notice, and thirdly because we expect to stay in town most of the summer."

"I wish you could," Lucy continued. "I can't bear to think of three months with only an occasional glimpse of you."

"We might motor down even two or three times," Cunningham answered lightly, unwilling to encourage her mood by taking it seriously.

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There was a momentary silence as each sedately munched a marguerite and sipped the tea. Lucy made an attractive picture as she leaned back in her chair and rested her head against the cushion. She was tall and slight, — the figure which fashionable dressmakers love to drape and which men call “youthful” from lack of descriptive power to express their admiration. Woman-like, not satisfied with the favors given by the gods, she bemoaned the fact that her eyes were brown instead of blue, and that the wonderfully luxurious hair, her crowning glory, was not blond instead of brown. But she found no sympathizers. To men, she was one in whom they could wish no change; the women characterized her self-criticism as a pose to call attention to her physical superiority.

It was seldom that her face was in repose, and Cunningham thought the calm became her mightily, as he watched her with an amused expression. He had never noticed before that her lashes were so exceedingly long, or that her profile was so nearly perfect. He decided, in that brief interval, that this attitude showed his hostess to even better advantage than the light-hearted, irresponsible yet irresistible vivacity which always associated itself with his thought of her; that this calm was even more convincing proof of her beauty than the tantalizing smile which came as much from her dancing, mischievous eyes as from her lips, and which made every man she met her ardent admirer and defender against all-comers, mainly of her own sex, who ventured to suggest that Lucy Spencer's daring *camaraderie* was hardly what might be expected of a married woman with two children. Even the ideal Margaret had once quietly remarked this to her husband, but Cunningham, as she had foreseen, quickly rallied to the cause.

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"Nonsense, Peggy," he had said, "Lucy is a good pal, that's all. She is unconventional; but at times a man finds it a positive relief to meet a woman who is able to forget her sex. She's as harmless as she is beautiful."

"I wouldn't dare argue against so prominent a member of the Boston bar," Margaret had said with a smile which Cunningham recognized as significant, "with the definite certainty that as the case would be tried before a jury composed of men, the plaintiff could expect no mercy. I'll wait until we get women on the jury."

Cunningham's mind reverted to this conversation as he sat watching his companion. How severe the judgment which woman passes upon woman, — how much more exacting than the standard which man sets for his fellow-man! Lucy's eye met his squarely as she looked up.

"But you probably won't do it," she said. "You don't care for Vallie, and Margaret doesn't approve of me, so as soon as we are separated you'll yield the point to her as another one of those 'immaterials,' and I don't believe I shall see you once."

It required a moment for Cunningham to recall the conversation which had been apparently concluded by the intervening silence.

"Perhaps I can make a real issue of it," he replied with mock gravity. "I must do something to assert my independence. But Vallie and I are good enough friends, and so are you and Margaret. Our hobbies aren't all the same, but that's what gives life its interest."

"You agree with Margaret that I am hopelessly silly and indiscreet, now don't you?"

"That you urged me to come here this afternoon with so little reason would seem to substantiate such an opinion, whether Margaret held it or not."

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"But you're not angry with me, are you, Ned?"

"It would be difficult to remain so long; but frankly, you do frighten me sometimes. A pretty woman can never afford to be the slightest bit indiscreet —"

"I don't see what difference it makes whether she is pretty or not. A woman's a woman."

"Yes, I know; but with some women their faces are their chaperones. I've seen lots of women who couldn't be indiscreet if they broke every convention in the decalogue of society."

Lucy laughed and then became demure. "I didn't know that indiscretion in some one else's wife ever frightened a man," she said.

"When 'some one else's wife' is a friend, whom the man admires except for those indiscretions, he considers it genuine cause for alarm."

"Then you do admire me except for that?" she asked quickly. A moment later as if to herself: "I wonder if by any chance we should have cared for each other if we had met — earlier."

"That is a fairly good-sized question," he replied, indulging her. "We don't have to decide it now, do we?"

"No," she answered seriously; "but sometimes I wonder if I could have cared for any one except myself if conditions had been different."

"What an absurd remark," Cunningham asserted. "You happen to be out of sorts with Vallie, and —"

"Out of sorts with Vallie?" she echoed. "Nothing of the kind. Vallie's all right as husbands go. I think we'd be good friends if we weren't married; but the more I see of husbands the better I like dogs. Of course, you're an exception, Ned, and perhaps that's why I like you. It isn't a case of the burnt ashes of love at all. Vallie evi-

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dently thought I would make an attractive house ornament, and there wasn't any one I liked better, so before either one of us knew it we were walking together up the broad aisle, and listening to the congratulations of our friends. It's the same old story, but I'm not finding any fault with it."

Cunningham was amused in spite of himself. "You are certainly incorrigible, Lucy; but I beg of you don't let any one else hear you talk like that."

"Vallie wouldn't mind," she continued. "As a matter of fact, I think he's as grateful to me for amusing myself without boring him as I am to him for letting me do so. The dear boy is proud to have other men admire his wife, and proud that I still manage to keep some of the good looks I had when he married me.—Never mind how I keep them, Ned; if you're curious, ask Margaret.—He's proud of his children, but a little of them goes a long ways with him. If Larry had a hare-lip, or Babs had squinty eyes, he never would look at them again. Vallie's all right. You needn't worry about him a bit."

"Then how about me?" Cunningham demanded. "I'm somewhat married myself—"

"That's just the point," Lucy again interrupted. "Being married makes you safer than these other men,—immune as it were. You and Margaret adore each other, and no one on earth could hope to raise the slightest ripple on the placid surface of your matrimonial tranquillity even if she wanted to, which I certainly do not. Don't you see, Ned, that's where you do me an injustice when you call me indiscreet. If you weren't married, it wouldn't be safe for me to tell you how much I think of you, but as you are there isn't the slightest chance of a misunderstanding. Vallie and Margaret are disgustingly

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healthy, and even disregarding all laws of chance, if you and I were both free I probably shouldn't care for you at all. Today I'm particularly doubtful, since you spoke of starving and beating me. Vallie wouldn't think of such a thing."

"But are your indiscretions, as I call them, really confined to those 'immune,' Lucy — even granting that immunity is a positive factor. Where, for instance, did you meet Captain Auchester?"

She looked at him curiously. "At The Country Club races. Why do you ask?"

"You invited him to call on you?"

"Why not? Vallie introduced him."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"Not a thing, except that he's agreeable. That's Vallie's business. He's mighty entertaining." She leaned forward with ill-concealed curiosity. "Do you know anything bad about him?"

"Nothing, except that he has offered no credentials; and until I knew something more I should not think of presenting him to Margaret."

"Well, don't blame Vallie. The poor boy was perishing for a drink, and he couldn't leave me standing on the lawn alone, could he? He had to introduce some one, and Captain Auchester at least is amusing. I was grateful that he was the first man Vallie's eye happened to find after he felt his thirst coming on."

"And he's unmarried," Cunningham added significantly. "Suppose, for instance, that you find that he gives you something to think of besides yourself, and you begin to get dependent on him, or on any one of these men who have just left, to relieve your ennui, as you say you have on me, — what then?"

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"But I wouldn't, Ned," she insisted. "I tell you it is because I feel so safe with you. I know that you wouldn't take advantage."

She stopped suddenly as an idea possessed her, then she placed a hand quietly over Cunningham's. "You dear old Ned," she said softly, but with supreme satisfaction in her voice; "I really believe that you are jealous of Captain Auchester."

"Stuff and nonsense!" he cried, rising abruptly. "There are limits which even you must observe. I refuse to stay and give you the opportunity to make yourself ridiculous."

"You are, you are!" she repeated exultantly, rising with him and preventing him from withdrawing his hand. "Dear, dear old Ned! Please keep on watching over me just as you are now. But Ned, you needn't be a bit jealous of Captain Auchester."

She drew closer to him and suddenly clasped her arms about his neck. "I wouldn't do this to him, would I, Ned?"

"I should hope not!" He firmly held her from him, angry at her audacity, half-intoxicated by the soft pressure of her face against his own. "I should hope that you would know better than so to forget yourself at all."

"Oh, Ned, — don't be cross!" The smiling face again came nearer to his, and the dancing eyes mocked his self-restraint. "Neddie," she repeated softly, "you may kiss me if you like — just once, to show how much I trust you."

Cunningham held her in his arms as in a vise for so long a moment that it frightened her.

"You're not really going to do it!" she cried aghast.

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"It would serve you right if I did, just to punish you, you little vixen; and the fact that I don't isn't due to you or to me. I might even forget Vallie in wishing for this little minute that I wasn't married myself, but I'm only human, child, and I wouldn't take that chance again if I were you."

"I knew you wouldn't, Ned," she replied with a weak, conscious laugh of relief as she sank into a chair when Cunningham released her.

"Let this be a lesson," he continued sternly. "You have no right to love any one except — "

"Love!" she echoed, sitting upright. "Who said anything about that? I don't love any one except — myself. Now who's silly? My! but your arms are strong! I promise I will never try again to force even a mother's kiss upon you. You need not run when you see me — you may consider yourself quite safe. Now will you forgive me? — yes?" she ran on, giving him no opportunity to take part in the conversation — "yes? Then goodbye. And remember, you've promised to assert your independence, so I shall expect you and Margaret to motor down to the shore — how soon shall we say? — within two weeks? Goodbye!"

II

THE telephone was a welcome diversion to Lucy Spencer after Cunningham departed. In spite of her self-control the episode which had just taken place left her feeling more uncomfortable than anything which had occurred within her recent memory, and that was as far as her memory went back. She knew that she was impulsive, and prided herself upon it, but she had been sincere in saying to Cunningham that she believed him unjust in calling her indiscreet. Now, she admitted to herself, she had given him every reason to consider his judgment correct. All of this introspection was gradually leading her on toward self-reproach, and nothing annoyed her so much as to discover one of those rare intervals near at hand. So, just as her slippered foot was beginning to tap the rug with a certain regularity of motion which could lead only to personal humiliation, a call to the telephone relieved the situation.

It was Valentine Spencer whose voice responded to her prompt "hullo." His bridge hands had evidently run well, judging from those variations in tone by which a wife discovers many things which a husband does not realize he is disclosing. He was just ready for dinner, the voice said, and Captain Auchester was with him. Yes, they had been playing auction together at the Badminton Club,

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and the Captain was a wonderful player, — had real card sense, which so many of the men lacked. If convenient to her, he would be glad to bring him home to dinner; if not, they both would dine at the club.

The cordiality of Lucy's reply left nothing to be desired, so matters easily arranged themselves to the satisfaction of all. Nothing could have fitted in better with her mood. After Cunningham's criticism, she felt it to be an act of expiation to show at least a temporary interest in her husband, and the presence of so agreeable a dinner guest as Captain Auchester made it possible for her to do this with no personal sacrifice. And the Captain was so entertaining that his presence, she was sure, would enable her to banish the uncomfortable thoughts of the past half-hour. A few hasty orders relative to the dinner, a change of gown, a careful inspection of herself to make certain that her face bore no telltale evidence of even temporary discomfort, and she was ready to welcome the two men a few moments before the usual hour for dining.

Lucy's dinners, however small or informal, possessed an air of individuality which always gave them distinction. Many women display their originality in the variety of their salads, but Lucy constitutionally avoided the conventional road to fame, enjoying no less the exclamations of surprise which came from her guests when they met with some unfamiliar dish. This was the extent of her marketing. She was quite content that her efficient housekeeper should provide the substantials, but found a hectic pleasure in ransacking the markets and the stores of fancy grocers in her quest for the unusual. Russia contributed its fresh caviar, China its choicest tea and even a bird's-nest soup when Lucy's knowledge of her guests permitted the experiment, Japan gave of its sweetmeats and India

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a special curry which she had prepared from a famous old receipt; but to remove this particular dinner from the commonplace she selected a small jar of rose-leaf preserve, imported directly from Persia.

Auchester lived up to his reputation, and Spencer no less than Lucy fell beneath the spell of his charm. No two men could have formed a greater contrast: Spencer was slight and of medium height, with light hair, so light that his eyebrows and the slight growth upon his upper lip scarcely showed; the Captain stood six feet two in his stockings, straight and erect, with full cheeks bronzed by exposure, and his hair and mustache dark and luxuriant; Spencer was nervous in his temperament and quick of speech, while the other man gave evidence in his bearing of a training which had produced a calm exterior which nothing could disturb. The one was the carefully finished product of the city; the other the product of the world.

All that the guest had said was spoken simply, yet during the dinner his hosts learned much of the wide extent of his experiences. He referred incidentally to his service in South Africa under Little Bobs, in Egypt under Kitchener, and, more recently, in Mexico under Diaz.

"What were you doing in Mexico?" Lucy demanded. "The English took no part in the revolution."

Auchester laughed consciously. "That is a fair question, Mrs. Spencer," he replied, "but in answering it I fear I shall lose caste in your eyes. The truth is that I can't keep away from a scrap. It's in the blood, I fear, for I can't remember the time, even as a little chap, when I was not mixed up in some one else's difficulties. I always happen to be where trouble breaks out, become inoculated with the excitement, and before I've really considered the matter, I'm

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in the thick of the fuss. Curious, isn't it? I left my regiment two years ago, determined to keep away from the smell of powder and all that sort of thing, but the only difference seems to have been that since then I've been fighting under different flags."

Lucy listened with rapt attention. "It sounds like a chapter out of 'The Prisoner of Zenda,' doesn't it, Vallie?" she asked.

"I beg of you!" the Captain raised a hand protestingly. "I'll grant that I've laid myself liable to be regarded as a soldier of fortune by what I've said as well as by what I've done, but the fact is that I'm a bit sensitive on that score. In army circles we look upon a man who earns his living serving different sovereigns as more or less of a bounder, so I've tried to save my self-respect by remaining my own master whenever I've fought away from my regiment and the English flag. Perhaps it's a small difference, but it is my only defense. If war broke out here today against any country but England I would simply have to join in; and if it was against England I'd swim to Lands End to get into it from the other side."

"Can't we stir up a little unpleasantness, Vallie, and give our guest a chance for a demonstration?" Lucy asked, mischievously.

"You're making game of me," the Captain again protested; "I'd much rather talk of something else than myself. Tell me where you found this wonderful rose-leaf conserve, — this breath of Omar Khayyám, stolen from the flesh-pots of Persia."

Lucy's heightened color reflected her pleasure that the sudden inspiration which came after Vallie's telephone had brought such immediate reward. "How did you know that it came from Persia?" she asked.

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"The only time I ever tasted it before was in Imam Zade Jaffur, nearly two years ago, and I've carried the perfume and the flavor with me ever since."

"He isn't a soldier, Lucy," Vallie broke in; "he's a poet. What he says doesn't rhyme, but that's the highest form of poetry."

"Say rather an epicure, my dear Spencer," the Captain laughed; "for poets often go hungry, and I never do."

"Then Persia is another country you've been in," Lucy commented. "Did they get up a war for you there?"

The Captain leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily. "I am certainly giving you a jolly good chance at me this evening, even when I try to escape, for as a matter of fact they did get up a war for me, and I passed through some of the most curious events I have ever experienced."

"You aren't going to stop there, are you?" Spencer demanded as the speaker paused.

Auchester's face grew serious. "No," he said as if deliberating, "though frankly I am ashamed so to have monopolized the conversation. I am absurdly sensitive to odors, and these rose-leaves here bring back two days and a night I spent in Persia of which I can't help telling you, if you don't mind listening."

"Please go on," Lucy insisted, leaning forward eagerly with her chin resting upon her hands. "Is it the story of another Desdemona who 'loved you for the dangers you had passed,' or is it of 'moving accidents by flood and field'?"

"There is no Desdemona in my story," he replied quietly, "but rather

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*'Tis a Chequer-Board of Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays!*

Don't call me a poet again, Spencer, — but I do happen to know my Omar."

"Please go on!" Lucy still insisted. "This is splendid!"

"It was almost two years ago," the Captain began. "I was in Persia simply as a traveler, when, as Mrs. Spencer says, they arranged this little war for me. Since then, of course, Persia has attracted the sympathy of the world because of Russia's duplicity and my own country's failure to do her duty, but at that time the only war-cloud on the horizon was raised by the attempt of the ex-Shah, Mohammed Ali Mirza, to regain his lost sovereignty. There is nothing of interest in the part I took in the defense. What I want to tell you about is the capture of Arshad-ed-Dowleh, the leader of Mohammed Ali's broken army.

"The company of which I was a temporary member was stationed at Teheran. We received news of fighting, and were ordered out as reinforcements, leaving the city by the Shah Abdul Azim gate about six o'clock on a hot September morning, with forty miles of dusty road between us and our destination. Just before sunset we reached Imam Zade Jaffur, and found the fighting over, with troops of singing, happy Bakhtiari tumbling over each other as they swarmed into camp. The news of the day was that Arshad-ed-Dowleh, the commander-in-chief, had been captured, and I hastened to the tent where he was said to be.

"The fallen leader was sitting on a rug, drinking tea,

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smoking cigarettes with his captors, and tasting that rose conserve from a small jar before him. I had seen a photograph of him at Teheran, in which he wore a gorgeous uniform, with his breast covered with medals. Now I saw him clad in a red-striped Turcoman shirt and a pair of European dress trousers, — relics, perhaps, of his life in Vienna. One foot was bare, and the bandage showed that he had been wounded.

“He greeted me in French, as if I had been an old friend. Outwardly there were no evidences that he felt concern over his capture, yet the piercing glance he gave me showed that he was striving to read in each new face the fate that was in store for him. Poor chap! I couldn’t help feeling sympathy, for I knew that the decree had already gone forth that he was to be executed the next morning. It really couldn’t be otherwise, for only the day before he himself had ordered the execution in cold blood of a Bakhtiari Khan who had fallen into his hands, and he was a dangerous rebel fighting against the government of his country.

“Then began the most remarkable game between him and his captors that I have ever seen. He was treated as an honored guest, no suggestion being given him that his fate had been decided, and he too proud to question. There he lay, resting on his elbow, apparently quite at his ease in the flickering light of the candles, conversing with his captors in that complimentary language which in Persia only the most intimate friends employ, one with the other, — talking against time, in an effort to win their sympathy. He was the most eloquent of all, speaking freely of the fight of the day before, of his life and that of his master Mohammed Ali since they had been in exile, of the diploma he had won as a result of his military studies

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in Vienna, and of the future of Persia, — and all the while behind him, in the shadow, stood the silent Bakhtiari, leaning on their rifles, laughing with him when he joked, listening attentively when he was serious. There was no man present who did not feel the drama of the night.

“‘*Istiklal-i-Iran na miravad*,’ said Arshad-ed-Dowleh. ‘The independence of Persia will never march. The Russians are too strong for you and the people are too foolish. Progress does not lie that way. You call me a *mujtabed*, a friend of despotism. You call yourselves liberals, democrats, socialists. But progress is something apart from all these labels, and I, too, want progress for my country.’

“When it became late, a suggestion was made to put out the lights, but he intuitively did not wish the sitting to be ended.

“‘This talk is better than old wine,’ he said. ‘Why should we sleep? I have loved you from afar, and now that we have met it is good to be with you.’

“They told him that the hour was late and that the morning start would be early.

“‘Do not leave me alone,’ he entreated, ‘for your men used ill words when they captured me today.’

“‘They shall do so no more,’ said Colonel Yeprem; ‘you shall sleep here, close beside me, and no one shall come near you in the night.’

“In the morning I found him seated in a chair on the same spot where we had conversed the night before. Colonel Yeprem told him, very gently, that he must die, for the State dared not let him live. He received the news without the slightest evidence of emotion, simply asking for paper that he might write a letter to his wife, who was a royal princess. He wrote with a steady hand, gave the

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letter to the Colonel, then rose deliberately and with great dignity. The speech that he made, standing there in the close shadow of death, was the most superb exhibition of courage and patriotism which I have ever witnessed. Caution was now thrown to the winds as he delivered a masterly indictment of the constitutional government. Using the French Revolution and the history of England as illustrations, he scathingly arraigned the poor achievements which followed fine promises. He pictured the condition of the Persian peasant, touching his hearers deeply. He indicted as enemies of Persia and hired servants of Russia the entire Kajar family, excepting only his master Mohammed Ali, who, he said, lost his power because he refused foreign dictation. He took up the departments of State and pointed out that in none had reform been established. 'And why?' he demanded. 'Because we are still fighting for our lives against intrigue on every hand. And you who say that you are lovers of your country — is it patriotic to promote revolution at the moment when we are straining for reform and the independence of Iran?'

"In closing his speech he thanked God that he had always been *vatanparast*, a man who worshiped his country. He commended his soul to Heaven, asked that his body be delivered to his wife, and that the gold chain which he wore around his neck should be buried with him. Then the firing party appeared and halted before him. He ceased speaking and turned to them without a moment's hesitation. Between the files, he marched with them for perhaps forty yards. They placed him ten yards in front, where he stood erect, unbound and without a sign of fear. When the command 'Ready' was given, he stood even a little straighter, and shouted,

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'*Zindabad Vatan*, — long live my country! Fire!' The volley rang out. He fell, then rose to one knee. The second section fired, and all was over."

There was a dead silence at the table when Auchester finished his narration. Tense emotion had rarely been felt by Spencer or by Lucy, and both were deeply affected. Then Auchester rose deliberately, standing erect and seeming of even greater stature than his height warranted. He lifted his champagne glass:

"Here in this far-away country, my friends, with the odor of that rose-leaf conserve in the air and its delicious flavor upon your lips, drink with me to Arshad-ed-Dowleh, — the bravest soldier I have ever known."

III

CUNNINGHAM was more meditative than usual as he dined with his wife after his return home from the Spencers'. It was customary for coffee to be served in the library, whither they always adjourned after dinner: he frequently to work out some problem connected with his law cases, Margaret reading beside him, the evening's silence being occasionally broken by a discussion of some topic of mutual interest, of which they had many. They never felt that continued conversation was essential to their happiness, and to that extent had learned what life imparts to few. For what are words except the medium ordinarily required to convey what is imperfectly expressed without their aid? But if two hearts, understanding, require such medium to commune each with the other, then it is certain that the imperfection extends beyond its natural bounds.

As Cunningham took his customary seat at his writing-table and drew a cigar from the jar near at hand, Margaret watched him attentively. He lit the match mechanically and leaned back in his chair, not heeding the maid who stood beside him.

"Don't you care for your coffee?" Margaret asked.

"Of course!" he replied, turning quickly. "I didn't notice that it was here."

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Margaret took a step forward as the maid left the room, and leaned against the arm of the great chair.

"Tired tonight?" she asked. "That Montgomery case is pulling on you more and more."

"No, dear," he answered; "it isn't that just now. It's another case, which, in a way, is just as serious. There's a woman in it."

"A woman!" she echoed lightly; "that should make it interesting."

"I'm not joking, Peggy," he replied seriously. "The woman is Lucy Spencer, and it isn't a case for a lawyer. She needs a mother and a good sound spanking."

Margaret laughed. "What madcap prank has Lucy been up to now?"

"It isn't what she has done so much as what I fear she may do," Cunningham answered. Margaret waited for him to continue. "I wish you liked her better," he exclaimed suddenly. "She needs some one who can talk to her more plainly than a man can; and you are just the one to do it if you will."

"How long do you think Lucy Spencer would take any one's advice if it didn't fit in with her own fancy?" Margaret asked.

"It would have to be done diplomatically, of course," Cunningham admitted; "but Heaven knows she needs it."

"Don't you think you're treading on dangerous ground?" she asked pointedly.

"Not a bit," he protested; "what could be dangerous about it?"

"She's flirting with you desperately, Ned, and — she's a married woman."

"She flirts with every one she happens to like, if that

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is what you call it; but she hasn't the slightest idea in the world of the risk she runs. She's nothing but a child, and ought to have a guardian."

"In place of which she has a husband."

"Vallie is a fool. It amuses him to have Lucy turn the head of every man she meets. He jokes about it."

"And you want me to become her *cicerone*?"

"No; but I wish you could give her a chance to see how rational women really act."

"She doesn't care for other women; I've heard her say so."

"Because other women look askance at her," Cunningham replied. "She enjoys shocking them, and they encourage her in it by being shocked."

"When is she going to the shore?"

"Thursday."

"I'll run in tomorrow afternoon to say goodbye. It is a fairly delicate mission which you name me for," she smiled, "but I'm sure I ought to help you in any effort for reform."

"Don't make sport of me, Peggy," Cunningham protested earnestly. "I couldn't talk like this to any one except you; but I really do feel that child on my conscience. Lucy has a lot of good stuff in her, and she's more of a woman than she would be willing to admit. You understand. This is a chance to do some real missionary work, and it's worth the effort."

He was right when he said that his wife understood him, and happy is the man of whom this may be said! Born and brought up in Boston under rigid influences inherited straight from the Puritans, Cunningham reflected their principles in thought and deed. His father would have died a martyr rather than yield to the perni-

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cious compromise with Satan, which was all he saw in any progress of the times; his mother, while less assertive echoed her husband's ideas like a mirror, which reflects only what is placed before it. Perhaps Margaret understood her husband better because she came into the family before the old people passed away, and compared to them, Ned was a radical.

Being of a later generation, it was natural that his ideas should be somewhat tempered by the more modern environment, but it was really Margaret who had effected the change which made him human. She loved him for his strict adherence to principle, but without his realization she taught him that a principle may be elastic without losing its integrity. She was proud of his prominence in all movements for civic uplift, and brought him to a point where he could accomplish results impossible had he rigidly adhered to the creed he had assimilated from his father.

But Margaret, with all her quiet, helpful influence, could not change in him that didactic characteristic which had made ten generations of Cunninghams leaders in their respective spheres. He was a man who apperceived rather than perceived, and because he knew that he knew he assumed certain prerogatives which the man who only knows would scarcely dare. Some women would have been surprised to have a husband manifest so tense an interest in another man's wife; Margaret understood. He could no more see weaknesses in his friends without assuming the responsibility of rectification than he could allow misrepresentation in his profession to go unchallenged. Those who knew Edward Cunningham learned to understand and appreciate him; others were bound to give him their respect.

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The following Sunday found the Cunninghams with the problem of selecting a destination for their afternoon's motor ride.

"Why not run down to the Spencers'?" Margaret suggested. "They must be settled enough to see us by this time, and I promised Lucy we would motor down as soon as possible."

Cunningham looked at his wife gratefully. "You're a sweet girl, Peggy," he said. "There aren't many wives who would take up a case like this. That's what I call being a good sport."

"If it has to be done I'm sure that it is wiser for me to undertake it than for you," she said smiling; "but truly, it isn't such a hardship as you try to make it out. Lucy always amuses me. Until now, I haven't felt any responsibility, but I'm not sure that I shan't enjoy the experience. It's certain to be interesting."

"Oh, what a ride!" Margaret exclaimed after the car left Lynn and its cobblestone streets behind them and swept on into the Shore Drive. "Who ever saw such variety? I never tire of it!"

It was always an aggravation to turn away from Marblehead town, for they both loved its quaint streets and picturesque buildings, but even had their destination not been settled, Salem, suggestive of witches and times long since gone by, would have lured them on. Then the panorama became modernized again as the old with its Spartan simplicity gave way to the new with its princely expression of present luxury. No wonder that Margaret reveled in its variety! From the moment the grim little church at Beverly is passed, each estate seems vying with the others for beauty of location and stateliness of architecture. Through Beverly Cove and Pride's Crossing

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to the Farms are mingled counterparts of the villas of Italy and the chateaux of France, the country estates of Old England and the colonial Georgian style of the New; yet in spite of the magnificence, each house is made to fit into the shore foliage as if a part of the picturesque coast line itself. Here, with a sprinkling of Western families, and of the diplomatic corps, Boston luxuriates during the summer months.

All too soon the motor drew up at the Spencers'. Vallie was sitting disconsolate by himself on the piazza, smoking a cigarette, and he welcomed the callers as an answer to his unexpressed prayer to be relieved of his ennui.

"Every one is off doing something with somebody else," he lamented as he helped Margaret from the tonneau. "We are down too late again this year. Lucy is unpacking; I'll call her."

"Let me run in and surprise her," Margaret cried, "while you and Ned visit here on the piazza."

Lucy was indeed unpacking. Margaret found her in the large living-room leading from the hallway seated on the floor, an open trunk before her and with gowns, stockings, and every variety of feminine attire thrown about in reckless profusion.

"You dear thing!" she cried as Margaret discovered her.

"Why in the world are you unpacking down stairs?" was the surprised query.

"Look at the size of the trunk," she said. "They don't make men on the North Shore strong enough to carry one like that. I had no idea you would come down so soon. Did Ned make you?"

"He threatened to beat me if I didn't," laughed Margaret.

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Lucy was serious at once. "Tell me," she asked, "is Ned really disagreeable like that at times?"

"Of course," Margaret replied. "Don't I show signs of it?"

"No," Lucy continued in the same subdued tone; "but he told me once that that was what I needed, and —"

Margaret laughed outright. "You had better look out; he never warns but once!"

"You're joking, I know you are." Lucy's spirits revived at once. "But anyhow, it is sweet of you to come down so soon. — Who's that?"

There were unmistakable sounds of voices on the piazza. "I'm afraid Mrs. Spencer can't see you," Vallie was saying; "she's in the midst of her trunks. I'll ask her."

"Isn't Vallie the cutest little liar?" Lucy said to Margaret in a low whisper. "He knows perfectly well that this is the only trunk I ever unpack myself."

"It's Mrs. Channing, Lucy," Spencer announced as he entered the room. "Can you see her?"

Lucy's lips settled firmly together as she turned to Margaret. "The old cat!" she whispered. "This is a visit of inspection, and she couldn't even wait a decent length of time after we came down. Her daughters were running in here a lot at the end of last season, and she wishes to see whether I am so impossible as to imperil their delicate young lives. Sweet of her, isn't it? Yes, Vallie, show Medusa in; she can't turn me into stone."

With a sudden slide Lucy resumed her position on the floor amidst the gowns and the lingerie.

"What in the world are you going to do?" Margaret demanded, astonished by her sudden action. "She'll be in here before you can get up."

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"Never you mind," was the determined answer. "Just keep your eyes on Lucy."

A moment later Vallie reappeared, escorting a woman of perhaps sixty years. In figure she was comfortably stout; her face was plain but intellectually strong and full of individuality; her bearing seemed to indicate a mild degree of uncertainty regarding the propriety of her call, — an attitude perhaps justified by the chaotic condition of the room into which she was conducted. Her black silk dress was elegant in its simplicity; she wore her hair in that fashion which for nearly half a century has prevailed in Boston amongst those elderly persons whose social position makes it possible for them to take revenge on their past. The bonnet was of a much more recent vintage; in fact, it was the latest style, — for a bonnet. As the full scene spread itself before Mrs. Channing she drew back for an instant, amazement showing on her face and indecision in her footsteps.

"How good of you to call, dear Mrs. Channing," Lucy exclaimed with a world of welcome, struggling to rise, but succeeding only in reaching a kneeling position. "You must forgive me for letting you come in among all this clutter, but I did want so much to see you. Of course you know Mrs. Cunningham. Margaret dear, please make room for Mrs. Channing beside you. You will forgive me for being so unceremonious?"

"It is my own fault for coming so soon," the visitor said magnanimously. "My daughters speak of you often, and I intended to call all last summer."

"I'm sure you did," Lucy beamed, "but the summers get shorter and shorter, don't they?"

"They do," Mrs. Channing assented, relieved by the quick understanding. "I often make that same remark

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to my husband. This year I was determined that nothing should interfere; but had I known —”

“I beg of you!” protested Lucy. “It is I who should apologize for my poor housekeeping in that we are not settled. We’ve been here three whole days and I’ve only just reached this pet trunk of mine.”

While her hostess’ conversation ran on inconsequently, Mrs. Channing’s eye wandered over the various articles which were exposed to view, and finally settled again upon the vivacious speaker. The round trip was completed just in time, for Lucy looked up as she asked a question.

“What kind of a season do you think we shall have this year?”

“Oh, about as usual, I dare say,” was the quick response. “Of course your idea of the season is quite different from what mine is, but I dare say it will be about as usual.”

“Dear me!” Lucy showed much concern. “You speak as if our seasons were terribly stupid affairs. I’ve found them most enjoyable.”

“I don’t say that I haven’t found them enjoyable,” Mrs. Channing corrected; “but naturally my idea of pleasure is quite different from that of a young woman like you.”

“Of course,” Lucy admitted promptly; “but you are with your daughters so much, and their ideas are not so far from mine, are they?”

“I should hope —” Mrs. Channing caught herself before the sentence was complete. “My daughters are naturally very quiet in their tastes except when they are influenced by others.”

Lucy smiled cheerfully, but her amusement came from her own thoughts rather than from the remark she had just heard. She saw before her at that moment two active

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girls, eager for the opportunity to express themselves normally, yet partially suppressed by the puritanic atmosphere in which they lived. She recalled some of their conversations, and wondered how long the atmosphere would succeed in predominating over nature itself. There was too much sympathy in Lucy's heart to permit her to speak her thoughts aloud. What she said was: "Yes, I know what dear, good girls they are; but surely you don't object to their love of horses and golf and tennis, and things like that. They must have some excitement."

"Young girls need no excitement," was the flat contradiction. "I suppose it is too late to stop this athletic notion which they all have, but it is simply aping the men and I don't like it. No one thought of such a thing when I first came down here, and why should it be any more necessary now?"

"Aren't the estates much more beautiful now than they were then?" Lucy inquired. "Hasn't much been done to make them more attractive?"

"Why, yes!" replied Mrs. Channing, not catching the drift of the questions.

"Then why isn't it natural that the people and the life they lead should have become more attractive?"

The caller was vexed to find her hostess combating her opinions. Most of Mrs. Channing's acquaintances either acquiesced or held their peace. Her annoyance took the form of making her comments more personal in their application and less veiled.

"Excitement is not necessary to beautify estates or to make people more attractive," she insisted. "The nervous unrest which some of the cottagers have introduced during the past few years is certainly prejudicial to the place and to all who live here."

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"You don't suppose she includes us among the nervously restless, do you, Margaret?" Lucy asked, with so fascinating a smile that no one could think her serious.

"I have no intention of making any personal application," was the disclaimer, so expressed that it served to emphasize the previous suggestion into a fact. "Of course we realize that there is a certain element here who think that the summer gives them a license to lead a life more unrestrained than even they would dare to live in the city. Naturally we who knew the place before they changed it look upon this as an unfortunate innovation; but I have no intention of mentioning any names."

"I'm sure I'm quiet enough," Lucy said demurely, as if thinking. "See how domestic I am! I'll wager that there isn't another woman on the North Shore who unpacks even one of her own trunks. Of course I never pack anything but my cigarette case and the cocktail shaker, but it's something to do the unpacking, isn't it?"

She looked slyly over at Margaret as Mrs. Channing straightened up and audibly sniffed, but the words were spoken so innocently that it was difficult for her caller even to manifest disapproval. Dignity, moreover, forbade, and discretion suggested another topic of conversation.

"I really feel very much concerned over the trend of modern times," Mrs. Channing said; "everything moves with such terrific pace. The younger generation look upon it as the natural thing, and we who can draw comparisons must save them from the awful rush. Driving is ruined by the automobiles, and still more so by the motor-cycles — road-lice I call them. We are shot through the ground in tunnels, men fly in the air, we receive messages out of nothing, and they say that soon we can communicate with each other without speaking."

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"But all this is progress, isn't it?" Margaret asked suggestively.

"I suppose it is. We can't object to that even if we don't like it; but the influence on the people themselves is the worst of all: even the women now smoke and drink, and every one breaks the Sabbath."

"Why did you speak of smoking?" Lucy demanded. "I've been perishing for a cigarette, and I didn't like to suggest it. I haven't had one all day. You see I found that the smoke irritated my throat, so now I never indulge until afternoon."

"Don't let me keep you from enjoying yourself," Mrs. Channing said stiffly.

Lucy almost disappeared in the trunk as her caller spoke, and triumphantly produced the silver case. "That is so sweet of you," she smiled gratefully, holding it out to Mrs. Channing. "I don't suppose there is any use in asking you to take one? They're very good."

"I thank you, no."

"Mrs. Cunningham is old-fashioned too, so I must smoke alone," she continued, lighting the cigarette and leaning comfortably against the trunk. "After all, you don't need it as much as those of us who have excitement. Although I am so quiet myself, I do have a certain amount of that from being thrown more or less with the people you describe, and I find that smoking is very soothing to the nerves. You must admit that, with the best intentions, it is almost impossible to prevent excitement from entering into even a commonplace existence."

"If the present generation finds it so indispensable," snapped Mrs. Channing, "what in the world is going to happen to the next? Even the children today are blasé and sophisticated; by another generation nothing less

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than murder will give them the thrill of excitement which they used to receive from their nursery games. I don't know where it is going to end."

Lucy laughed. "You make me shudder for my innocent bairns," she said. Then her eye rested on something inside the trunk, and again she reached within its capacious depths, this time producing a silver cocktail shaker. "There it is!" she exclaimed. "I really thought I had forgotten where I packed it. Isn't it unique?" holding it up as she spoke. "Do you take cocktails?"

Mrs. Channing's face became still more firmly set. "I do not smoke," she said pointedly; "neither do I drink."

"What a pity!" Lucy's laugh rippled merrily. "Forgive me for laughing, but for a moment I thought you were quoting from the Bible: 'it toils not neither does it spin.' Silly of me, isn't it? But seriously, it is too bad that you don't take cocktails, for Vallie — Mr. Spencer — can mix them in three different languages. Margaret dear, why do we keep on talking about things which don't interest Mrs. Channing? She'll gain a wretched impression of you if you don't suggest some sensible topic of conversation. Suppose I show her some of my new gowns. Would you like to see them?"

"I must be going —" the caller began.

"Not when Mrs. Spencer is about to show us some of these wonderful creations, I am sure," Margaret urged, too much amused to be willing to have the entertainment come so soon to an end.

Lucy did not wait for Mrs. Channing's acquiescence, but drew from the trunk gown after gown until she found the one she wished to show.

"Isn't it a dream!" she demanded, standing erect and holding it against her body. "Vallie thinks it's too dé-

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colleté for the city, but I thought I might get a chance to wear it down here."

"I don't see why you should make that distinction," Mrs. Channing said testily. "It seems well suited for any one with your figure."

"Of course," Lucy admitted. "A woman has to think of that, always, doesn't she? Most of the women one sees in décolleté gowns are like my Kodak films, — over-exposed and under-developed. But isn't it a dream!"

"I really must be going," Mrs. Channing insisted, rising with determination.

"Please don't," Lucy urged. "It doesn't take long to wait a minute, and I really want to show you some of my new lingerie. Vallie says —"

"Good afternoon," Mrs. Channing shouted rather than spoke. "I am very glad to have found you at home."

"Well, if you must go, of course I can't detain you," Lucy said resignedly; "but it has been such a joy to see you that I can't bear to let you go."

"Good afternoon," Mrs. Channing again remarked, passing through the door.

"Goodbye," Lucy called sweetly after her. "Do remember me to your daughters. Vallie, dear, be careful Mrs. Channing doesn't fall going down those steps."

She turned to Margaret. "There," she said, "perhaps that will give her something to think over. We've been coming down here for five years, and until she found her ewe lambs in danger of being eaten up by the she-wolf, she never gave a sign that she knew I existed. The girls are really very nice and I like them, but — deliver me from Mamma! I wish I could have thought of some more ways to shock her."

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“Don’t reproach yourself,” Margaret reassured her, wiping from her eyes the tears which the laughter had brought. “You thought of enough. Oh, Lucy, Lucy!” and Margaret buried her face in the folds of the gown thrown carelessly on the couch beside her, convulsed with a paroxysm of laughter which she no longer sought to control.

IV

IN the practice of his profession, Edward Cunningham held an enviable reputation for his legal knowledge and skill and for his eloquence in presenting cases to the Court; and here again might be found the expression of his high professional ideals. His sizing up of the situation was always masterly, the logic of his argument convincing, and his own confidence in the righteousness of his cause became contagious because of the sincerity with which he pleaded. This, in part, was naturally the expression of his art, for no man could actually so assimilate the responsibilities of his clients without breaking down in the process; but it was an accepted fact among his fellow-lawyers that Cunningham always avoided, if possible, taking causes in which he could not at least sympathize with the attitude which circumstances forced him to assume. It was for this reason that the "Montgomery case," to which Margaret had alluded, was, as she said, "pulling on" him more and more; and the occasion of his anxiety was the apparently unsolvable mystery in which the case was shrouded.

The problem as it stood was briefly this: Late one evening a buggy turned into the main street of one of Boston's suburbs, and continued on its course in the direction of the city. There was nothing about the vehicle

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to attract unusual attention until suddenly an expressman on the sidewalk heard two shots ring out in fairly close succession, saw two distinct flashes of light proceed from the buggy, and heard a voice cry out, "I am shot." The reports startled the horse into a gallop, and the carriage passed beyond the view of the man. A mile further on, in crossing a bridge over a railroad track, the buggy locked wheels with a heavy farm team coming in the opposite direction, and the horse was stopped. Inside the vehicle two men were found, — one dead, the other badly wounded, the extraordinary feature of the shooting being that each bullet had passed through its victim's body in the same direction; namely, from right to left.

Montgomery, the wounded man, had recovered, and was held charged with the murder of Brewster, his companion in the buggy. In its early development the case contained so many contradictory features, and its importance in the public mind assumed such proportions, that the Attorney-General felt warranted in securing the consent of the Governor and Council to call Cunningham to assist the State in the prosecution. Montgomery protested his innocence and denied all knowledge of the shooting. He claimed that the first shot was the one which wounded him, and that while dimly conscious of hearing a second shot, his own condition was such as to make him unaware of all that happened later. The theory that the shooting had been done by some one unknown upon the street had been abandoned, as the expressman who heard the shots came forward at the inquest with his statement that the flashes had proceeded from the buggy, and he proved a reliable witness. Montgomery was sitting on the right hand and Brewster on the left when the bodies were found. From this position, Mont-

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gomery could have fired a shot taking the direction shown by the wound in Brewster's body; but nothing as yet in the hands of the prosecution showed how a shot could have been fired to pass through Montgomery from right to left.

Spencer had brought the case into the conversation while the two men sat on the piazza. Cunningham usually avoided any discussion of professional questions outside his office, but as a matter of fact there were not many subjects he could discuss with Vallie. Realizing the limitation, he offered no objections now that a common ground was found.

"Why couldn't Brewster have put his arm around Montgomery, behind his back? That seems perfectly possible to me," Spencer remarked at length.

"He could have, provided Montgomery would let him; but he couldn't have held the revolver against his own side in such a way as to have had the bullet take the upward course it did unless he had been a contortionist."

"Oh," Spencer replied dubiously. "That rather knocks out my theory, doesn't it?"

"I believe it does. If Brewster had shot Montgomery and wished to commit suicide there are several places he would have selected rather than underneath his right arm. It's a complicated mess."

"I was telling Captain Auchester about it last week. He was much interested and asked a lot of questions. I thought I had a pretty good theory, but you've knocked it out."

"Who is this Captain Auchester?" Cunningham asked abruptly.

"Why, you've met him," Spencer replied, surprised.

"Yes, barely, — but who is he?"

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"I don't know, except what I've picked up about him. Duncan met him on board steamer. Played bridge with him, and all that sort of thing. Then he got him cards to his clubs."

"Does Duncan know anything about him?"

"I suppose he does. He wouldn't have put him up at the clubs if he hadn't, would he?"

"Who put him up at the Badminton Club?" Cunningham persisted.

Spencer moved uneasily and nervously reached for a fresh cigarette. "Why, — I did."

"Yet you say you know nothing about him."

"Oh, he's all right, Ned. What's the use of all this catechizing? I put him up at the Badminton because he's a corking fine fellow, and I knew Duncan wouldn't have stood for him if he hadn't been all he seemed."

"That man Lewis wasn't 'all he seemed,'" Cunningham continued, suggestively.

"I know he wasn't, and he got into Peters, who put him up, just as much as he did into the others," Vallie chuckled to himself. "That was really a rare one on poor old Peters. He hasn't got over it yet."

"There are others, who contributed liberally, who even yet don't fully appreciate the joke," Cunningham replied dryly.

"But what has all this to do with Auchester?" Spencer demanded. "Do you know anything about him that I don't?"

"No," Cunningham admitted frankly. "I know exactly what you all know, — which is nothing. I am simply protesting in my feeble way against the careless habit we have of throwing open the doors of our clubs to casual acquaintances, just because they happen to be agreeable

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fellows and good bridge players; or of using them as places where we may dump visitors whom we don't care to have in our homes. It's a wonder that we aren't victimized more often than we are."

"I think the English custom is devilish inhospitable," Vallie replied, "and our 'strangers' room' at the Badminton is about as snippy."

"I had an amusing experience at the Griffin Club in London." Cunningham laughed at the recollection which Spencer's reference to English clubs brought back to him. "I had been an 'over-seas' member for a year or more before I had the opportunity to exercise my prerogative, and the first time I used the club-house happened to be on a Saturday just before luncheon. I went up stairs into the 'morning room,' and finding myself out of cigarettes, I rang the bell for the page, giving him the order. Presently he returned, empty-handed:

"'Very sorry, sir,' he said, most respectfully; 'you can't have the cigarettes.'

"'Why not?' I demanded, determined not to be the victim of discrimination.

"'The Honorable Secretary is out of town, sir.'

"'Oh!' I said, not fully comprehending. 'When will the Honorable Secretary return?'

"'On the Monday, sir,' he replied cheerfully; 'he's only away for the week-end, sir.'

"'Don't the members smoke when the Honorable Secretary is out of town?' I inquired.

"'Oh, yes, sir; but the cigarettes are in his desk, sir, and he has taken the key.'

"Seeing my distress, the boy became inspired with an idea. 'I could get you an individual cigarette, sir.'

"'Prithee do,' quoth I.

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"Again he returned, this time with a small glass containing perhaps a dozen cigarettes. I took one and placed it between my lips, paying him his penny.

"'Where are the matches?' I asked as he retreated toward the door.

"'Beg pardon, sir,' he replied, still most respectfully, 'but you can't smoke in this room until after eight o'clock in the evening, sir.'"

Spencer laughed boisterously. "And yet you advocate English customs for American clubs."

"I wouldn't go as far as they do in keeping strangers out," he explained, "but I'm strong for the happy medium."

As Cunningham spoke he looked up and saw that Lucy and Margaret were standing together in the doorway.

"Hullo, Ned," Lucy exclaimed, as he rose and extended his hand. "I missed your story, but your last sentiment is fine and I quite agree with you. Still, I'm glad you didn't start your reform any earlier, for it never would have done to have shut out Captain Auchester. He dined with us just before we left town, and you have no idea what a wonderful man he is."

"You ought to hear some of his experiences," Spencer interrupted. "He's a wonder."

"I haven't anything against the man," protested Cunningham. "From what little I've seen of him I can easily believe all you say; but men like that usually bring with them some sort of credentials."

"You're naturally suspicious because you're a lawyer," Lucy continued. "That comes from associating so much with the criminal class. Don't you think that explains it, Margaret?"

"Don't appeal to me," was the smiling reply, as she

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advanced with Lucy to the long willow divan. "I never argue with Ned; he's sure to be too much for me."

"There you are again," cried Spencer, seized with a sudden inspiration. "It all comes right back to the fact that he's a lawyer, as Lucy says. He has trained himself to be suspicious and to argue cleverly. Then he takes it out of those of us whose training has all been different. Come, Ned, admit that it isn't fair play."

"I didn't realize that I was in an argumentative frame of mind," Cunningham laughed. "I accept my rebuke, and retire discomfited. Tell us what happened to Mrs. Channing, Lucy. You seemed to be having a love feast in there."

"I wish you both had been behind the door," Margaret said, again giving free rein to her laughter.

"I should have waited until some time when I had her all to myself," Lucy observed contritely. "I really intend to behave very discreetly when you are around, Margaret, but now you'll disapprove of me more than ever."

"My dear, you were simply delicious," cried Margaret. "I have never laughed so much at one time in all my life."

"Don't keep us guessing here," protested Vallie. "Let us in on the joke, won't you?"

"Well, the old Medusa came here just to look me over," Lucy began. "She has heard her daughters talk about meeting me, and she wanted to see what sort of creature I am. I shouldn't have done it, of course, but when I saw her sitting there with her Mayflower expression, in her shiny, black silk dress with little white frills in the neck and about her wrists, and her inverted conscience tied up with purity ribbons, — I simply couldn't resist the temptation."

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"But what did you do?" Cunningham asked.

"Yes, what did you do?" Margaret repeated, going off into another gale of laughter. "Tell the gentlemen what you did, Lucy."

"I tried to shock her, — and I think I succeeded," she said demurely.

"I'm sure you did!" Margaret corroborated.

"But how —" Vallie began.

"I offered her a cigarette, and asked her if she liked cocktails, and showed her my most décolleté gown, and told her how fond you were of lingerie —"

"Lucy!" exclaimed Cunningham, aghast.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Valentine. "No wonder she went out of here like a catapult! Why, Mrs. Channing is the president of the Society for the Draping of the Naked Truth. She'll have you arrested in the morning."

"You'll never forgive me," Lucy said sorrowfully to Margaret.

"Nonsense!" Margaret replied. "There's nothing to forgive, — but we shall have some explaining to do when we get home if we don't start right away. Tom Langdon and Billy Hayden are coming in for supper tonight."

"You don't think much of the success of my missionary work thus far, do you, Ned?" Margaret inquired of her husband as the car ran swiftly on towards home.

"On the contrary," he replied. "The fact that Lucy felt it necessary to explain is the most encouraging sign I have yet seen. Keep up the good work."

IT was no unusual thing for Langdon or Hayden or any one of a dozen other younger lawyers to drop in at the Cunninghams' for Sunday night supper. Cunningham took his profession so seriously that they always gained inspiration from even casual contact with him, and the high position he had attained made his influence far reaching in offsetting the early disappointments and discouragements which inevitably follow in the wake of fallen idols and broken ideals. Cunningham was temperamentally optimistic, and to practise law represented to him a privilege rather than a profession. When justice miscarried, he always claimed it was not the fault of the law, but rather because of its improper application on the part of the individual. These cases must always exist, he contended, as long as imperfections remain in the human character; but the law should not be blamed for them.

Langdon had asked particularly that he and Hayden might come in, on this Sunday night, as he hoped for an opportunity to say a word to Cunningham regarding his own connection with the Montgomery case. It was merely a coincidence that the Court had appointed him as counsel to defend Montgomery. As a matter of fact, Langdon's appointment was made before the older lawyer

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was called into the case by the Attorney-General, and the only reason Cunningham felt for hesitation in accepting the call was that he would be opposed to this younger, less experienced man, his friend, and perhaps stand in the way of the glory and reputation which so often follow in the wake of a *cause célèbre*.

"The Court has appointed you to defend this case," the judge had told Langdon, "feeling certain that the defendant's interests will be protected as fully and as carefully as though he were able to retain his own counsel."

Perhaps there was as much in the way the judge had said it as in the words themselves. At all events, Langdon accepted the case in the spirit of the appointment, and found that it served to elevate in his own mind the dignity of his profession. He always acknowledged frankly that he was a pessimist on the standpoint of high morality in every-day life, and he made no exception of the practice of law. To him it was no different from any other occupation, and he had entered it not as a "calling," but as a business proposition. The academic side appealed to him, and he had succeeded to an extent which warranted his appointment by the Court; but it was so at variance with his previous attitude to find himself regarding his present case in the light of a sacred trust, that he felt impelled to discuss matters with Cunningham. This was the particular occasion of his asking to come in for Sunday night supper, and he brought Hayden with him.

"Curious that we should be together in that Montgomery case, isn't it?" he remarked, while Margaret prepared the salad.

"Your appointment is a compliment which I hope you appreciate," Cunningham replied. "It's a sobering re-

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sponsibility to have the defense of a man's life put on your shoulders, and the selection of counsel is not made lightly, I assure you. Judge Amory believes that you can develop the defense if there is any, and you're sure to come through with added laurels, though frankly I don't expect to see you win your case."

"Of course you don't," Langdon laughed. "It is your job to see that I don't."

"Not necessarily," Cunningham corrected.

Langdon looked puzzled. "That's a curious remark," he said.

The older lawyer understood what was working in his friend's mind. "Then it is your idea that the duty of the defending counsel is to free and of the prosecuting attorney to convict the prisoner?" he asked.

"Of course," was the frank response.

"Regardless of the testimony?"

"Let us say in spite of the testimony."

"Surely you don't carry your ideals so far as to dispute Tom's position on that," Hayden broke in.

"If that isn't the case, why did they call you in?" Langdon demanded. "If it had been left in the hands of the District-Attorney, or even of the Attorney-General, I'm certain that I could at least get a disagreement. Why they should take such extreme measures I don't understand. I can't remember a similar instance since Webster was called into the Knapp-White case. You're the modern Webster, Ned!"

"I don't wonder that you are surprised that the Attorney-General asked me to assist him," Cunningham explained; "it was a complete surprise to me. I am no criminal lawyer and have no interest in such cases except from a psychological standpoint. That is un-

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doubtedly the explanation, for this problem is an interesting one."

"I have never associated psychology with law," Langdon replied.

"It is a phase which has been late in reaching America. I commend it to you.—Now tell me, in your opinion is there reasonable doubt as to the man's guilt?"

"The evidence is admittedly all circumstantial, and is only as strong as it's weakest part. In a case like this there is always a chance to find a break in the chain; but with your uncanny power to make other people see things the way you do, I admit that the defense is up against a real proposition."

"What would you do, Tom, if you became convinced that your client was guilty?"

"I think I should feel greatly relieved; then if he is convicted he would only be getting what belongs to him. If I believe him innocent and lose the case I'll always have it on my conscience that perhaps there was something I might have done which I didn't."

"Would you drop a case if you became convinced of a client's guilt?" Hayden asked Cunningham pointedly.

"No," was the reply. "A lawyer often discovers this at a time when his withdrawal would injure his client's cause; but in such an event I should certainly urge an admission of guilt and work for the lightest possible penalty consistent with justice. Having once undertaken the defense, a lawyer is bound by every fair and honorable means which the law of the land permits to prevent his client from being deprived of life or liberty except by due process of the law. Beyond all this, a case before the Court is not unlike a play upon the stage, — everything

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is exaggerated. If one side presented its evidence in merely its normal values the other would gain a distinct advantage through the loss of proportion."

"Then you don't consider that it is my duty necessarily to win this case?" Langdon demanded.

"Not unless you remain convinced of your client's innocence or that a reasonable doubt exists as to his guilt."

"Suppose we reverse the case. What will you do if you become convinced of the same thing?"

"All which lies in my power to secure justice."

"But that would be to work with the defense?"

"Practically," admitted Cunningham. "The State is thirsting for no man's blood, and while your approach to the case is necessarily different from mine, in a way they are identical. Go ahead with your defense, Tom, and if you can convince me that the man Brewster could have been killed by any one except Montgomery, the prosecution must necessarily drop its case."

Langdon was silent for some moments and the others at the table refrained from breaking in upon his thoughts. "I wish I believed that the law could be administered on that basis," he said at length. "The longer I practise the more pessimistic I become. The idea seems to be to get your facts together and then make the law correspond, and the cleverest lawyer is he who can best show his client how to bend the line of the law without breaking it. Why, only yesterday I heard a lawyer say of another, who ranks high as a publicist right here in Boston, 'I believe he is honest, but he doesn't know the meaning of the words "fair play."'" "

Cunningham smiled. "That ought not to make you pessimistic; it should rather encourage you to greater effort in upholding the honor of your profession."

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"But, Ned," Langdon burst out, keyed up by his intense earnestness, "you know as well as I do that reputable lawyers go into the courtroom every day with papers in their pockets which would absolutely ruin their cases if given to the other side,—and keep them in their pockets."

"Yes, I do know it," Cunningham admitted, "and of course that is all wrong; yet how is it any different from what we meet in business or every-day social intercourse? How many friends would you have if you always spoke the whole truth? how many business houses would remain solvent if in their relations with customers and banks they insisted on telling all they know? I don't defend any of it, and the saddest part of all is that if everything was administered in the strict letter of honor and integrity the honest man is the one who would suffer. We must accept conditions as they are, unfortunately, and do our part to raise them to a higher standard."

"Now that you have settled all that, suppose you let Mr. Hayden and me join in the conversation," Margaret remarked.

"There is just one thing more I want to say before I drop this argument with Tom," Cunningham continued. "You spoke a moment ago of my having the power to make other people see things the way I see them, and if that is true I want you to appreciate the fact that it is only because I succeed in persuading them of my own conviction. Any one ought to be able to do that; but if you yourself don't believe what you are advocating it is naturally a difficult matter to persuade others. If, through this power, as you call it and such as it is, I ever accomplished an injustice to a prisoner, I should never forgive myself."

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"I believe you, Ned," Langdon acknowledged with sincerity. "What you have said has helped me a lot. I'm proud to be against you in this case."

"Have you heard from the Spencers since they went to the shore?" Hayden asked, following Margaret's suggestion.

"We have just returned from there," she replied. "They aren't settled yet, but they're on their way."

"I suppose Vallie was throwing trunks around and cutting the grass, and making himself generally useful, as usual?" Langdon inquired.

"As usual, — yes," Margaret laughed.

"And Lucy was mending the children's socks?" Hayden continued.

"Exactly, — you describe the domestic scene to a nicety."

The momentary silence which followed these sallies was broken by a general laugh.

"When do you suppose that girl will grow up?" Langdon asked.

"When experience clutches hold of her and makes her suffer," Cunningham answered seriously. "It is too late for her to learn the lesson from any less exacting master."

"I hate to think of Lucy suffering," Hayden remarked. "She has always lived on the foam of life, and I can't imagine her dipping into it any deeper, much less going to the depths."

"Too bad she couldn't have married a man with at least a suggestion of solidity — some one who could have brought out her character a bit," observed Langdon.

"A man like Thomas Langdon, Esquire?" Margaret suggested, mischievously.

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"Not a bad idea at all," Langdon retorted. "Her money would have cured even my pessimism; and I know I could have done a better job at making her happy than Vallie has. Lucy is a woman all right, underneath the froth."

"It's a pity that her children don't mean more to her," Margaret said reflectively. "She can't get much response from her husband, but Larry and Babs are dears, thanks to that splendid governess they have."

"She doesn't neglect them, Peggy," Cunningham protested. "The care she has taken in selecting their governess is evidence of that."

"When Babs was ill last winter, Dr. Bryant told me, she was up with her every night," added Hayden, joining Cunningham in Lucy's defense.

"Only to turn her over bodily to Susette as soon as the danger was passed," Margaret completed the story. "It isn't motherly, that's all."

"Another note to be struck by that stern master Experience Ned speaks of," Langdon said; "but I do hope you're wrong about the suffering. I couldn't bear to have Lucy suffer."

"You men are not sincere," Margaret declared suddenly. "You all dance attendance on her, laugh at her unconventional speeches and acts, encourage her in the foolish idea that she can safely disregard established proprieties, and then bemoan the fact that she must suffer in order to learn her duty toward life. That is an inconsistency which I have noted exists in men in general."

"Don't be unfair," Hayden protested.

"Heaven knows that I have advised her until she looks upon me as a grizzled grandfather," Cunningham added grimly.

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"I'm glad you have, Ned," Margaret continued; "for that is what she needs. If every one laughs at her smart sayings and risqué doings, how is she ever to know?"

"Who laughed at her this afternoon?" Cunningham demanded maliciously.

"I did, — and I'm ashamed of it." Margaret could not restrain her mirth as she recalled the expression on Mrs. Channing's face. "I was wrong, and I intend to atone."

"That is exactly the situation we are up against most of the time," explained Hayden. "I don't know what happened this afternoon, but what Lucy does is so screamingly funny when it occurs that we can't help being amused. The only difference is that we don't atone as you say you're going to. I don't quite see how we could do that."

"Try to be serious with her, and give her something to think of besides herself and other trivialities," Margaret suggested.

"I'll go right down and tell her that I'll be a grandfather to her, like Ned," Langdon replied.

"It would destroy one of Boston's most attractive features to bring Lucy down to conventions," Hayden said meditatively.

"And incidentally make a woman in the process," added Margaret. "It's worth thinking over."

VI

IT was three weeks later that Auchester accepted Spencer's urgent invitation to be his guest for the week-end. Vallie had seen much of him at the Badminton Club during this time, and his admiration for the Captain's skill at auction was second only to his enjoyment of the genial companionship. Auchester took him seriously, which few of his friends did. In fact Spencer had so long been the butt of most of the good-natured raillery at his clubs that he had come to accept it as a matter of course; yet he was keenly conscious of the difference in Auchester's attitude, and it gratified an unspoken desire. Nor was Spencer the Captain's only friend. The stories which Auchester told, drawn largely from his unusually interesting experiences, made him always the center of an attentive group of club members during the coffee, cigar, and liqueur period. At cards he proved to be as good a loser as he was winner, and he was always ready to join in any proposition, indoors or out, which might be suggested. He played golf as well as he did auction; he rode a horse with the masterly skill of an English officer, seeming a part of the animal itself. All in all, he had become immensely popular, and Spencer took to himself much credit that he had stood his sponsor, being hugely delighted by the preference which Auchester seemed to show for his companionship.

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It was only because the settling of the shore house had taken longer than usual that the invitation to the Captain had been delayed at all. Spencer would have had him down the week following the visit from the Cunninghams, but Lucy declined to consider it at that time, and on the following week had insisted that it be postponed once more. She had not analyzed the reason, but she knew that this was what she wished; and Vallie simply fussed and fumed for a few minutes, and then acquiesced. As a matter of fact, Lucy felt the need of a little time to recover her entire composure. Her experience with Cunningham had shaken her so deeply that she was not yet herself. What if he had taken advantage of her foolishness! She had never gone so far as this before, and when she felt Ned Cunningham's arms close about her she believed for a moment that he was going to take her at her word. Then he had scolded her, and she really expected that he would cherish her folly against her, as she knew she richly deserved. It had been friendly of him to run down with Margaret so soon. This was like him. He wished her to know that he not only forgave her, but that he understood. And Margaret had come too, more intimate and friendly than ever. Lucy was determined to make amends, and as Ned had cautioned her particularly against Captain Auchester, she postponed his coming until she had taken ample time to settle back into her normal state.

The house which the Spencers leased was located on one of the most superb sites along the North Shore, built on a cliff overhanging the sea. The broad piazza, shielded at one end against the east wind, was of course its chief attraction, and the location gave the house as much seclusion from the Shore Drive as if built upon a larger

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estate. The stone wall in front was flanked by high-growing shrubs, and on either side of the entrance gate masses of rhododendrons grew in luxuriant profusion. The inclined driveway wandered as it led up to the house, past a well-kept lawn. The Italian garden was at the right, on a level with the house, lending its brilliant coloring to the vista seen from the piazza, and behind this was a vine-grown pergola built on the edge of the cliff, forming the most enticing of the many retreats which the grounds afforded. The children took particular delight in the summer home, which offered so great a contrast to the restrictions of the city, and the piazza gave them ample opportunity to play "ship" and all kinds of marine games with a sense of reality which could scarcely be equaled. When Lucy came down stairs the latter part of the morning, the governess took the children to the small beach below, so that their activity need not disturb the reading of the latest novel or the perusal of the magazines.

This was the usual routine of Lucy's brief morning. She lunched with the children except when they proved too trying, on which occasions she would send them to finish their meal with the governess. Lucy's discipline stopped here. If they were reasonably quiet and good-natured she enjoyed their childish pranks and prattle, but at the first signs of those storms which make up the normal child life, she promptly relegated them to the charge of the efficient Susette, who, as Lucy often remarked, was expressly employed for just that purpose. Later in the afternoon, after a leisurely change of raiment, the motor was called into requisition, and Lucy rode with friends or alone until train time, when she picked Vallie up at the station.

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Auchester went down with Spencer on Friday afternoon, and the two men joined Lucy in a drive which extended nearly to dinner time. It was the Captain's first view of the glorious North Shore, and his enthusiasm was boundless. The run took them beside the water as far as Gloucester, and then back past the sumptuous summer estates at Magnolia and Manchester.

"I'll show you another variation after dinner," Vallie assured his guest, in response to one of his many exclamations of delight.

"What is the plan for the evening?" Lucy asked.

"I'm going to take the Captain over to The Yacht Club at Marblehead for bridge, and we'll motor back by moonlight."

"What are the other plans?" she continued.

"Tomorrow we are to play golf all day at Myopia, and we'll stay there for dinner. Eustis and Miller are going to join us in a foursome, and we have a table made up there for auction in the evening. Sunday we'll motor a bit, and Eustis has asked us on his yacht at Marblehead after dinner at the club. Not a bad program, — eh, Auchester?"

"It sounds like a busy one," the Captain assented.

Lucy's disappointment may have conveyed itself to her husband, but she had not intended to have him see it.

"Why don't you run over to Myopia on Saturday and lunch with us, Lucy?" he asked suddenly. "I can send the car back for you."

"And break into your beautifully arranged plans?" she replied with a smile which so concealed her real feelings that even the Captain was deceived. "Not for worlds."

"Perhaps you're right," Spencer quickly acquiesced,

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with evident relief; "but I didn't want you to think we were running away from you."

"Vallie is always so thoughtful of me," Lucy said, turning to Auchester.

"Who wouldn't be?" the Captain replied quickly, with an expression in his voice which told her that he too resented her exclusion. For some unexplained reason it cheered Lucy, but Spencer really believed he had been magnanimous.

During the next three days the men slept at the house, had their breakfasts before Lucy came down, and returned at night long after she had retired; and during the same period Lucy cherished in her heart a constantly increasing resentment at Vallie's indifference and lack of understanding. This was not a new phase, she admitted, and she should have become accustomed to it; yet there was a difference. The house guests they had previously entertained were usually couples, which made it more inevitable that the forms of entertainment, whatever they were, should be enjoyed together. Vallie had never before had a friend who had allowed himself to be so monopolized. It was not a change in any way, she repeated to herself again and again: it was simply that Vallie was selfish and thoughtless now as always. She noticed it more, that was all, and resented it for the first time.

So the routine, as far as Lucy was concerned, was little affected by the Captain's visit. They had a single motor ride together Sunday afternoon, by which time she had reached a point where it was difficult for her to enjoy it. The men were left at The Yacht Club, and she drove home alone. After her solitary dinner she wandered out on the piazza, attracted particularly by the bright, golden edge

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of the moon, just rising out of the water. She drew a large wicker chair close to the railing, and threw herself into it, facing the water, to watch the changing lights, and to think, think, think. Oh, the agony of those thoughts which come in troops, unbidden and undesired, when the mind has once centered itself upon a diseased spot in the structure of life! How merciful if some power were given us to slough it off and force cessation!

The sound of tires crunching against the gravel road at length aroused Lucy from unpleasant reveries, and she went quickly to the steps to greet her visitors. No one ever received a welcome more full of genuine cordiality than Ned and Margaret Cunningham, as they stepped out of their car and were eagerly seized by Lucy, one with each hand.

"I never was so glad to see any one!" she cried impulsively.

"All alone?" Margaret asked, peering around the moonlit piazza.

"Alone and disconsolate," was the reply. "Captain Auchester is supposed to be here for the week-end, but this afternoon is the only time I've seen him since he arrived on Friday. He and Vallie dined at The Yacht Club tonight, and are spending the evening on Mr. Eustis' yacht."

Cunningham listened with interest, and gave Spencer credit for having conducted himself with more than his usual sagacity. Aloud he said: "Margaret and I couldn't resist this wonderful evening, and what more entrancing destination could we have chosen than this piazza!"

"You never came to see any one who needed you more," Lucy insisted. "I have been feeling perfectly wretched lately, and tonight it is worse than ever. And I really

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believe, Ned, that it's all your fault. No, not ill," she hastened to explain; "but do you know, Margaret, Ned read me an awful lecture just before we came down here, and it has made me think and think and keep on thinking, — and Heaven knows that over-exercise is an imposition upon my mind."

"Ned has a way of doing that," Margaret admitted; "but what he says is usually pretty good sense, though I dislike to admit it before him."

"You mustn't take anything I said so much to heart," Cunningham protested.

"Did Ned tell you what I did?" Lucy turned suddenly to Margaret. "No? then he's a dear boy. But I'm going to tell you, so that you may know what a husband you have."

"I wouldn't," Cunningham expostulated quickly. "There is no occasion to think of it again."

"I'm going to," she said with decision; "but please give me a cigarette first, Ned. I must be feeling better, for I haven't cared to smoke for two days. Promise me you won't hate me when I tell you, Margaret."

"Was it as terrible as that?"

"Wait till you hear. I put my arms around Ned's neck and told him he might kiss me. There!" she continued with a sigh of relief; "I'm glad that is out of my system. What do you think of me now?"

"I think you were taking chances which no woman ought to take," Margaret admitted, frankly shocked by the confession. "What possessed you to be so foolish?"

"I haven't an idea. Of course, I'm very fond of Ned, but that wasn't why I did it. I suppose I was piqued because he always treats me so like a child."

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"Perhaps that was fortunate in this case. I'm glad that it happened to be Ned instead of to some other man."

"You're glad?" echoed Lucy; "you're glad? Aren't you even going to ask what Ned did?"

"I don't care what Ned did, Lucy. If I were a man and a woman as attractive as you are gave me that opportunity, I wouldn't care to have my wife ask what I did. If any one was to be blamed, it was you. If I thought Ned loved you, that would be another matter."

"Of course I am the one to be blamed; but I want to tell you that Ned —"

"I didn't say I blamed you," interrupted Margaret deliberately. "One doesn't blame children for doing foolish things; one tries to help them to realize that they are foolish. The fact that you have spoken of the matter just as you have shows that you have come to that realization; so no more needs to be said."

"But Ned didn't kiss me," Lucy completed her sentence at last.

"I'm glad he didn't; but far more glad for your sake than for his or mine."

Lucy looked into her face for a long moment, failing utterly to comprehend.

Margaret was sincere when she told the self-accused culprit that she held her no more accountable than she would have held any other naughty child. Never had Lucy appeared to her so attractively girlish, and to be offended would have seemed absurd. Margaret felt the same irresistible spell of that beautiful calm which had earlier impressed Ned, to which a quaint pathos was now added by the tears which welled up in her eyes and hung, demanding sympathy, upon the long lashes.

"Come, dear," she said with a smile full of under-

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standing as she drew Lucy toward her and kissed her tenderly. "This has been on your mind a long time, and you will feel better now that you have freed yourself from it. Let's forget it. You and I understand each other better than we have before, and I want you to let me come closer into your life. Will you, Lucy?"

"Isn't it silly to cry?" she answered, throwing her arms about Margaret and pressing her face passionately against her own. "I haven't cried before since I was a child, — and this is another evidence that I am one still, just as you and Ned say. Yes, Peggy, do come closer into my life. I want you, dear, — and oh, how I need you!"

VII

AFTER the Cunninghams left, Lucy resumed her seat, again to think but with her thoughts controlled by far different emotions. What had prompted her to tell Margaret of her humiliating freedom with Ned? Impulse! that same impulse which was responsible for the act itself. In this instance it had turned out for the best, but she realized that again she had taken the same awful chance. What wife except Margaret would have sat quietly by and heard another woman confess that she had thrown herself into her husband's arms, and have made that confession serve as a means to bring the two more closely together? Impulse was the enemy against which she must struggle; but with Margaret's help and with Ned's it would be easier.

How long she sat there Lucy had no idea; but she was frankly surprised again to hear an automobile turning up the road. She rose with less enthusiasm this time, as her resentment had been controlled rather than lessened by her visit with the Cunninghams. Refusing the help of the chauffeur, the Captain was lifting Spencer bodily from the tonneau, and one glance at the expression on the face told Lucy all that she needed to know. Auchester saw her mortification and disgust.

"I hoped you would be asleep, Mrs. Spencer. Your husband is ill —"

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"I see he is," she replied, with lips scarcely parted. "I am sorry that our guest is obliged to be his nurse."

"Shall I take him to his room?"

"Let Léon take him up."

"Please — I beg of you," he protested. "I can carry him easily. These things will happen."

"I know," she replied, "but usually he has the sense to sleep it off before he comes home."

"It was my fault, Mrs. Spencer. They wanted to keep him on the yacht, but I feared you would be anxious. Please wait here a moment."

For the first time the situation assumed in Lucy's mind a humorous aspect, and this relieved the tension. To be carrying on this conversation with the Captain while he stood with her husband huddled in his great arms like a baby seemed to her incongruous enough to bring a smile.

"Forgive me for keeping you," she hastened to say. "Put him on the bed or anywhere. He'll be all right until his man gets there."

"And you'll wait here?"

"Yes."

Auchester found her sitting in her chair again, with her head leaning against the red cushion. The moon shone brightly on her face and hair and neck, and the Captain stopped short in his approach as he regarded her. "By Jove! but you are beautiful!" he exclaimed involuntarily.

Lucy sat up straight, surprised by the fervor of the exclamation. He took her action to mean disapproval.

"Forgive me," he said quickly; "I couldn't help it. We soldiers have the dangerous habit of saying just what we think. Don't be angry."

"Angry?" she repeated, settling back into her former position. "I'm not angry. Why should I be? No woman

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ever objects to being called beautiful. In this instance I don't take much credit to myself, as anything would seem 'beautiful' after what you've been looking at."

Auchester laughed in spite of himself. "I suppose it is natural that we men should take these things less seriously than women. Candor forces me to say that I am in no way shocked, so please do not give yourself uneasiness on that score. From my own observation of American hospitality the wonder is that any of us keep sober."

"I'm not worrying over Vallie's condition," Lucy hastened to correct; "it's the mortification of seeing him forget his duties as a host."

"You do him an injustice, I assure you. It is because he has been overzealous in his entertainment that he has succumbed."

"How is it that you have escaped?"

Again Auchester laughed. "Thanks to a stronger constitution, perhaps."

"Perhaps," she echoed; "but as a matter of fact, did you ever 'succumb,' as you politely term it?"

"No; I can't say I ever did. I'm so jolly strong, you know."

"And you wouldn't have much respect for yourself if you did 'succumb,' would you?"

"I really can't say, Mrs. Spencer. I'm certain I'd be as lenient in criticizing myself as I am in criticizing others."

"Again perhaps." Lucy was determined to carry her argument through to the finish. "But I know you wouldn't, any more than I should. I should hate myself."

"Don't let us talk of anything unpleasant," the Captain protested, "in such a night as this."

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She looked at him with a smile. "Quoting again?" she asked. Then, before he could reply, she continued:

*"In such a night as this
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls
And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents
Where Cressid lay that night."*

Auchester responded quickly to the new turn her mood had taken. Sitting on the railing, facing her, he smiled back, picking up the quotation where she left it:

*"In such a night
Stood Dido with a willow in her hand
Upon the wild sea-banks, and waved her love
To come again to Carthage."*

"And in such a night"

Lucy continued audaciously,

*"Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well,
Stealing her soul with many vows of faith —"*

She stopped suddenly, as she saw the smile in Auchester's eyes change into an expression so filled with admiration that it frightened her. "What am I saying?" she exclaimed. "I forgot how it ran until I was too far in to stop. That comes from daring to compete with your familiarity with poetry."

"This moonlight is intoxicating," was his answer, as he moved from his seat on the railing to a chair which he brought up beside her, placing it so that they faced each other. "Moonlight, poetry, and an uncommonly pretty woman," he continued; "Gad! what a combination!"

"Are you then so fond of all three?"

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“What soldier is not! Moonlight? — think what that means out on the desert, or in the mountain recesses, after nights of darkness or perhaps of storm! Poetry? — is not life the greatest poem which was ever conceived? That which we call poetry is but the mechanical contrivance for setting the Great Poem in motion within our souls. This may be verses written by some one nearer to the center of things than we are, it may be the sight of our country’s flag, it may be the odor of a rose-leaf conserve, as it was one night at your home. Woman? — what shall I say? She is the soldier’s aggravation. He can hope for no home life, and home is woman’s throne. He knows that woman is not for him, yet he permits her to creep into his heart, even with the certain knowledge that it means pain for both. He may admire, he may worship, he may even marry, — but woman does not belong to the soldier. Separation which must come, the necessity of facing death with no thought beyond its immediate effect upon himself, — all this precludes woman from the soldier’s life; yet were the obstacles multiplied a thousand-fold, they could not keep him from her.”

“That is why you have never married?” Lucy asked.

“The only reason,” he replied with decision. “While I was in the army, marriage could have meant nothing to any woman or to me. When my brother died, two years ago, it left me free to do as I chose, and I really expected that I should marry. But now I find that I have the fighting fever in my blood, and I doubt if I could be content to settle down to domesticity. Then, too, I have become more demanding as I have grown older. The woman to attract me now must have more to give than the girl to win whom I might have faced dragons, say ten years ago. So you see I am quite hopeless. But when

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I meet a woman like you, with beauty, wit, spirit and independence, I sigh even more at my hopeless state because they exist only in America, and such as they are so promptly claimed."

"It is very agreeable to have you say such pleasant things, but I fear flattery is only another attribute of the soldier."

"Even were that so, you could easily distinguish between what is flattery and what is truth. There are some women I might flatter; in speaking of you, even to yourself, I can but understate what I really think."

"I fear it is getting very late," she suggested, realizing for the first time how long they had been talking.

"Let us not count tonight by hours or by minutes, my dear Mrs. Spencer," Auchester said, assisting her to rise from the chair. "I venture to hope that our friendship may grow faster than could be marked by ordinary time."

"I hope it may," Lucy replied simply.

"Then, good-night," he said, raising to his lips the hand which he had not yet released. "Please leave me to lock up; I have learned how from Mr. Spencer."

VIII

THE following day was filled with unusual occurrences. In the first place, Lucy came down to breakfast at eight o'clock, — an event which had not taken place within the memory of any of the servants. Auchester was equally surprised, as she had made no suggestion the night before, when he explained the necessity of taking an early train, other than her fear that Vallie would hardly be in condition to motor with him to the city in time for him to keep his appointment. In fact, Lucy had not been certain that when morning came she would be equal to the emergency of coming down stairs to prevent him from having a solitary breakfast, but she had slept little during the night, and it proved a relief to get away from herself and to have some one with whom to talk.

"This is too good of you," Auchester exclaimed as he saw her entering the breakfast-room, and rose to meet her. "You should not have done it."

"I couldn't bear to have you leave us with only the memory of last evening," she replied, seating herself opposite him.

"I could ask for no sweeter memory."

Her eyes fell. "You know what I mean."

"That was forgotten before I went to sleep last night,"

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he assured her; "but the picture you presented as I came out on the piazza — with the moonlight coquetting with your hair, and casting shadows for the deliberate purpose of throwing your profile into beautiful relief — I shall never forget. You won't mind if I take that away with me, will you?"

"It would be ungracious to deny you so slight a request when you have been so generous."

"What can I do to make you believe me?" he demanded.

"I do believe you; it is you who don't believe me."

"I don't understand —"

"I'm not worrying about Vallie," she explained; "I'm just upset because he mortifies me before my friends. It's really self-pity, you see."

Auchester looked at her seriously for a moment. "Then last night's expression was not merely momentary?" he asked.

"Oh dear, no!" Lucy replied cheerfully. "Vallie is a little beast most of the time, but it's only when something happens like last night to call my attention to it, or when I stop to think about it, that I am annoyed."

Auchester found himself face to face with a new experience, and to him this was a decided and an agreeable novelty. He had thought that he knew women, but Lucy completely mystified him. The light-hearted manner in which she spoke of what would naturally be considered a domestic tragedy showed either an astounding strength of will or an astonishing apathy; he could not decide which it was, particularly as neither one appeared to fit in with her other characteristics. He was almost a stranger to her, yet she spoke of these intimate relations with a freedom usually accompanied by abandon, yet the artlessness of her frankness denied any such accompaniment.

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While he was working on his problem the maid announced that the motor was at the door.

"I am truly sorry to say goodbye." Auchester rose and held out his hand. "Except for your husband's indiscretion last evening I should not have had the delightful visit with you by moonlight, nor this charming tête-à-tête this morning. Personally I am grateful to him, and consider his act the height of hospitality."

"What time do you have to be in town?" Lucy asked suddenly, while he still held her hand.

"At ten o'clock."

"Then I'll motor up with you; it will do me good to get some air."

"Splendid!" he cried, as she turned to direct the waiting maid; "this is the jolliest surprise yet!"

"You are sure you wouldn't prefer to go by train?" she demanded, as the maid returned with a flower-bedecked creation, looking up at him archly as she tied the long veil about her head.

"Well, rather!" he laughed. "This beats the train ride hands down."

"Then off we go," she cried gaily, leading the way to the motor, closely followed by her guest. "I'll leave you wherever you wish, do an errand or two, and be back here for luncheon."

The car glided smoothly out onto the main road, quickly leaving the house behind them. Auchester welcomed the continuation of their conversation, for he was determined to solve this fascinating problem. Was she as indifferent to conventions as her actions proclaimed, or was it a pose assumed for the purpose of concealing the void left by her husband's failure to measure up to the standard of other men? This latter hypothesis seemed the likely

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one, for Auchester had come to know Spencer more intimately during the few days covering the week-end than during the entire period of their earlier acquaintance, and the greater intimacy had produced the usual result. Up to this time he had considered Vallie and Lucy collectively. He had met them separately it is true, but the same day; he had dined with them together; and without seriously analyzing the situation, he had associated them both with some of the pleasantest experiences he had enjoyed in America.

The three days just ended showed Spencer in his individual light, and the result was illuminating. Auchester possessed an inherent gallantry toward women, and it angered him inwardly to see his host so indifferent to the ordinary amenities of every-day courtesy toward his wife, whose personal attractions should demand such consideration, even though discounted by the fact of actual possession. The Captain had counted upon seeing much of Lucy during his visit, and to be so summarily disposed of in forms of recreation which appealed to him infinitely less, created an element of personal resentment. Spencer in his home, basking in the reflected light of his wife's brilliancy; Spencer in his club, surrounded by fellow-members whose presence helped to conceal his own inferiority; and Spencer dependent upon his individual resources, represented three distinct personalities; and it was the individual whom Auchester had now come to know and was growing to dislike.

It was natural that he should have heard some of the gossip about Lucy, but on the whole it had been good-natured and served only to stimulate his interest. The fact that she and Cunningham were so frequently seen together had piqued him somewhat until he learned that

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she made herself equally agreeable to every man she liked. She was unconventional, she was full of life, and evidently did her best to extract from each day's experiences all that they could contribute to her happiness, but in this Auchester found an expression of girlish irresponsibility rather than the deliberation of a clever woman of the world. And when her pride had been touched, as it was when he brought Spencer home from the yacht, she laid bare a woman's heart with which he could but sympathize.

Still the problem remained unsolved. Her attitude this morning was quite different from the mood of the night before. If it was assumed, as his second hypothesis seemed to indicate, then she was the most extraordinary woman he had ever met; if it was but another expression of a temperament which existed only on the surface of life, and was too shallow to feel beyond the moment, then she was merely the flitting moth, made to be admired and pursued by all whom she attracted, whether her pursuers possessed themselves of the regulation net, or simply such crude implements as worldly experience and appealing personality. If this were the case, then he had the right to join in the pursuit, both because of her husband's indifference and because it was the inalienable privilege of a British subject to do as he chose.

So the conversation on the way to town was deliberately experimental in its nature, and he found that his companion responded to his sallies, which became more and more daring as his experiment progressed, with a light-heartedness which seemed the part of a happy schoolgirl just released from the burden of restraint. She made no effort to conceal the fact that she thoroughly enjoyed being with him, or her admiration of certain qualities which he possessed. Yet with all that

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Auchester said, as he admitted to himself afterwards, there was a certain limit imposed by he knew not what. She met him on his own ground and played with him as cleverly as he fenced with her. The expression of her face, the tilt of her head, the sparkle of her eyes as she laughed merrily back at him would have tantalized a man less experienced in the ways of the world. To Auchester she had become a fascinating enigma. He told her other stories of his life in interesting and almost unknown portions of the world, and watched the laughing face subside; he touched every note upon which his skill had learned to play, and found the response so quick and yet so varied that it urged him on to exert his utmost powers. Yet at the end, as the car ran onto the Harvard Bridge, he, astute student of the world, found himself no nearer to his answer.

"It is a pity that you never married," she told him with an air of genuine sincerity. "It is selfish in a man of such experiences and with a personality such as yours not to share himself with some one less fortunate. Think how little inspiration most of us ever receive from our husbands!"

"It is the blow which strikes the anvil which produces the spark," Auchester replied gallantly. "If you have found any inspiration, as you call it, from what I have said, it is because you have brought it into being."

"I'd like to think so, — really I would," she laughed; "but the same hammer which produces the spark from the anvil annihilates when the substance it strikes is of softer metal."

"Then let us say that it requires two conductors at different potentials to bring forth the electric scintillation."

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"Your metaphors are not convincing," she laughed, "for electricity produces a shock; and that is what we women usually get from our husbands when we try to scintillate. Try again!"

"I give it up," Auchester admitted, joining in her merriment; "you are too much for me."

"How absurd!" Lucy insisted. "I shan't let you belittle yourself. Of course, you know how agreeable and fascinating you make yourself! I don't believe you can possibly escape some one of our progressive American girls if you make yourself as irresistible as you have to me this morning; and if a widow once sets a cap for you — well, perhaps you know how energetic American widows are!"

Auchester laughed heartily. "You seem bound to get rid of me," he suggested.

"On the contrary, you don't suppose I would urge you to marry if I thought it would deprive me of your inspiring society, do you? I'm far too selfish for that. In fact, the only advantage I have ever seen in being married is that it gives one a license to enjoy other women's husbands and other men's wives."

Auchester smiled, yet her reply again started his train of thought. Was her attitude mere bravado, or was it — he refused to answer even to himself. Whatever it was had increased his interest in her a thousandfold, and he wished that he dared to tell her so then and there.

A moment later the car slowed down in front of the Badminton Club. "Well," he said, "here we are all too soon. Why don't you stay in town a little longer and take luncheon with me?"

"Oh, I couldn't," Lucy replied quickly. "I'm going to lunch with Ned Cunningham."

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The Captain looked surprised. "But I thought you planned to return home?" he asked involuntarily. "Is Mr. Cunningham expecting you?"

"Oh, no," she explained. "He doesn't know I'm to be in town today; but as long as I am here I'm sure he will be glad to have me take luncheon with him."

Auchester responded with his phlegmatic "Oh," but he recovered himself quickly. "Then we must say goodbye," he said.

"Not goodbye," she corrected. "I'm not enthusiastic about another week-end, but I'll telephone you some day soon to come down and motor with me. May I count on you?"

"Absolutely," replied Auchester.

He stood on the sidewalk for a moment or two, hat in hand, watching the car disappear in the distance. Then he smiled grimly and shook his head as if in response to some thought which came to him as he turned and entered the club.

IX

THE idea of lunching with Cunningham had not occurred to Lucy until Auchester extended his invitation, yet it appealed more and more as the car ran down Boylston Street into the city. She could easily spend a couple of hours shopping, and then she would drop in at Ned's office, surprise him, and relieve him of the necessity of having a stupid luncheon all by himself. The plan worked out perfectly in her mind, and she rather prided herself on having thought of it so quickly when the Captain made his proposition. Of course, she might have lunched with him. He was most agreeable, and it would have been delightful to continue the companionship of the morning; but she had promised Ned to be more discreet, and he would be pleased when she told him just what had happened. Dear, good old Ned! He was indeed her friend, and now that Margaret knew all about the one silly thing she had done, she could rely on him more than ever without the slightest possible chance of any misunderstanding. Yes, it was a happy thought, and Lucy radiated satisfaction as she went from one store to another, purchasing from sheer love of buying rather than because she really wished anything, and because she was now as supremely happy as she had been utterly miserable the night before.

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It was the first time she had ever been to Cunningham's office, but she was a frequent visitor at her own lawyer's when it was necessary to sign papers or to go through the formality of discussing the investments of her considerable property, so she knew that it was a perfectly proper thing to do. The motor stopped in front of the entrance to the great stone building on State Street, and Lucy tripped lightly up the steps, found the numbers of Cunningham's offices from the directory, and stepped confidently into the elevator. A moment later she handed her card to the boy who came to the rail in the outer office to meet her, and was presently ushered into the larger room, where Cunningham advanced to give her a surprised welcome.

"Hullo, Ned," she exclaimed before he had a chance to speak. "I've come in to have luncheon with you."

"Well, well," he laughed, "this is an unexpected pleasure. I had pictured you still sitting on that beautiful moonlit piazza where we left you last evening; but as I come to think it over it wouldn't be moonlit at this time of the day, would it?"

"Hardly," Lucy granted, "and I never sit out there all night. After midnight the sea air is very injurious to the complexion, and we women have to be so careful of our complexions, Ned."

"I see. Then perhaps that explains your visit to the city this morning."

"You wretch, to suggest such a thing! You don't deserve it, but I'll tell you just why I did come: Captain Auchester brought Vallie home last night suffering from one of his very worst attacks. I rode up in the motor with the Captain to avoid seeing the little beast this morning, and came here to have luncheon with you be-

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cause the Captain invited me to lunch with him, and I was afraid you wouldn't approve. That is what I call heaping coals of fire. It was the only way I could get out of it, and besides I wanted to lunch with you. Aren't you properly ashamed of yourself and proud of me?"

"Of course I'm proud of you," Cunningham admitted, quickly sensing that she really felt herself to be acting with praiseworthy discretion; "and I'm always ashamed of myself."

"I don't quite see how it's all going to end," she continued seriously a moment later. "Vallie gets more and more stupid, and the other men I meet seem more and more agreeable. I'm trying hard to do what you and Margaret want me to do, Ned, but that leaves you the only man I can play with in perfect safety, and you are inconsiderate enough to be in business and not even down at the shore at other times. Margaret and I might divide you up, but this long-distance companionship isn't exactly the thing for an active disposition. What do you suggest?"

"I suggest that we run out and have lunch," Cunningham replied, looking at his watch. "Is your car outside?"

"Yes."

"Then suppose we go to the Touraine; it will be as comfortable there as anywhere."

Cunningham had not counted upon this as one of the results of his self-appointed guardianship, yet with Lucy in so tractable a frame of mind he felt his responsibility more than ever. Had the question been fairly put to him, he would have been obliged to admit that he himself was not wise enough to foresee any satisfactory outcome to the unfortunate domestic conditions existing in the Spencer household; and if he could not prophesy, how could he expect Lucy, whose only responsibility in life had been

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a more or less successful quest for personal happiness, to succeed where he had failed? The advice which he and Margaret had given her had not been constructive: it prevented her from finding her enjoyment in the only way she knew, and gave her nothing to take its place. Here was where his responsibility began, and until he or Margaret or both of them succeeded in creating some new interest for her they must be prepared to give of themselves to fill the void.

All this was passing through his mind while Lucy chatted on in a happy, self-satisfied monologue. She was so glad that he approved of what she had done. Of course she knew he must approve, for this was exactly what he and Margaret had urged upon her. They were right, — she could see it now, and they were dear, sweet friends to take enough interest in her to speak so frankly. From now on she would keep her impulses under control. She would enjoy her friends, but in a different way. He and Margaret must help her still and be patient with her, for it was a new experience to hold herself accountable to any one, and leopards were slow to change their spots.

Cunningham heard little or nothing of what she was saying, being only conscious that at last there was a pause. Then he excused himself and disappeared within the telephone booth, from which he emerged a moment later, picking up his hat and cane as he came towards her.

"She isn't there," he announced.

Lucy laughed merrily. "Whom do you usually keep in that little box, and why isn't she there?"

"Margaret, I mean. I thought we might get her to lunch with us, but I remember now she said this morning that she was going out somewhere."

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"I'm so glad, Ned," Lucy replied frankly. "Is that horrid of me? Of course I'd love to see Margaret, but today I want to have a real intimate talk with you. Do you mind taking luncheon alone with me?"

"Of course not," he answered quickly. "I thought it would be pleasanter for you, that's all."

"Then come. We'll go to the Touraine, have a quiet, cozy little visit, and then I'll motor back to Beverly and the Beast."

"You must not speak of Vallie like that," Cunningham expostulated. "You'll say it some time when some one will hear it who ought not to. You didn't make any break like that before Auchester, I hope?"

Lucy laughed. "You forget that the Captain brought him home. I don't believe I could tell him anything about Vallie that he doesn't know."

They found a quiet corner in the restaurant at the hotel, and Cunningham ordered a luncheon of fussed-up nothings, salad, and ices, in which all women delight, and Lucy in particular. He had taken little part in the conversation since they had left the office, his mind being actively engaged in planning out what he felt he ought to say. Finding him preoccupied, and having exhausted her present line of thought, Lucy glanced about the room.

"Ned," she said suddenly, "who is that elderly party leveling her lorgnette at us, — is she looking at you or at me?"

Cunningham turned in the direction Lucy indicated. "It looks like that caller who left your house in such high spirits the first Sunday Margaret and I were down there."

"It is, as sure as I live," she exclaimed, "Mrs. Channing, the two girls, and — yes, that's Mr. Channing. What a cunning little family party! See how longingly

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the girls look over at us! I'll just give her one more shock, for luck," and Lucy, holding up her cocktail glass as if drinking her health, bowed profoundly.

The lorgnette was lowered instantly, and from the attempts made by the three other persons at the table to explain the situation to Mr. Channing, it was quite evident that Lucy had succeeded in her purpose.

"What is the use of antagonizing?" Cunningham asked.

Lucy's smile vanished. "I'm sorry," she said simply. "There's something about that woman that makes me forget all my good resolutions. You don't know how she irritates me. I could almost be nasty to her if I had the chance. That man is her second husband, isn't he?"

"Third, I believe," Cunningham corrected.

"Good gracious!" Lucy exclaimed; "then he isn't a husband, — he's a habit."

"Most husbands are that, whether they're firsts or thirds."

"And mine is a bad habit, — and there you are!" Lucy concluded triumphantly.

"I want to talk to you a bit about Vallie," Cunningham said, taking prompt advantage of his opening. "You asked me a while ago what I thought would be the end of this situation, and I'm going to tell you, just as I would tell a client who asked me the same question."

"Well?" she queried as he paused.

"It's going to be a divorce or a scandal."

The color left Lucy's face. "It couldn't be a divorce," she said at length.

"Why not?"

"What would Vallie have to live on without the allowance from my property?"

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Cunningham started, as this was a revelation to him; but he was relieved to see that his companion had not noticed his surprise. "Don't think that I am recommending anything, Lucy, — I'm simply answering your query. But if the question of separation ever did come up, I presume Vallie could still be provided for."

"Why do you think the only other alternative is scandal?" she asked. "I have turned over a new leaf, and no harm has ever come from anything I've already done."

Cunningham smiled back at her kindly. "It need not necessarily come from you, — Vallie is just as apt to be responsible for it; but, my dear girl, I beg of you not to feel that you are in absolute safety just because you've made some good resolutions. I know — and all your real friends know — that you are as true a little woman as ever lived, but we also know that you have indulged your impulses ever since you were old enough to have them; and it will take more time than has elapsed since your resolutions took tangible form to make sure that you are strong enough to live up to them day by day. You said the same thing a moment ago yourself."

Lucy was silent for several moments after Cunningham ceased speaking, and he was glad to see that what he said had made its impression upon her. In his eagerness to make clear to her the seriousness of the situation he had entirely lost sight of the personal perspective, which had earlier concerned him enough to telephone Margaret, hoping to get her to lunch with them. He had lost sight of the fact that the very nature of their conversation, and the low tone in which it was conducted, necessitated a closeness of attention, each upon the other, which might easily appear significant to any one who was only too eager to find some meaning in their presence together. He

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had forgotten the Channings. Never had he tried harder to present a convincing case to a jury, — but in the courtroom he stood as the accepted champion of his client; never had he been more disinterested from a personal standpoint, — but in the courtroom his words were heard and his motives understood; never had he been more anxious to serve a client's interests, — but in the courtroom there could be no possibility of misinterpreting his relations to his client.

Lucy was as oblivious to all about her as he. Cunningham's words had pierced through her armor of pride and self-contentment, and had made their impress upon her heart. All the ugly stories she had heard or read of divorce courts and scandals rose before her, and she almost felt the grip of the hideous specters which Cunningham had conjured up. She looked suddenly full into his face, and he could read there the fright and abhorrence which was chilling her blood.

"Come," she said suddenly; "let's get out into the sunlight. I shall scream if I stay here longer."

"Not quite yet," Cunningham urged, encouraged by her evident distress. "As we have been sitting here I have thought of a solution, and I'm ashamed of myself not to have had it occur to me before."

"And that is?" Lucy demanded.

"Your children."

"My children?" she repeated interrogatively, not sensing his meaning. "Larry and Babs?"

"Yes; how much do they mean to you?"

"Why — what a curious question! I'm their mother."

"I know, but how much do they contribute to your life, and how much do you give to them?"

"Why, practically nothing — yet; but they're only

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little children. I expect a great deal of comfort from them when they are old enough to be companionable."

"Do you love them, Lucy?" he persisted.

"Why, Ned, what wretched questions you are asking! Of course I love them. They're my children."

"You told me once that you never loved any one except yourself. Is that true?"

"I didn't intend to put it quite as flatly as that. I know I'm selfish — in a way; but the children have never lacked care or attention, and they have been gratified in their desires far more than is good for them."

"Well, we've had enough enigmas, and there's no use of mincing matters. What I mean is this: I don't believe you can ever get much comfort or companionship out of Vallie. Enjoyment may properly come to you from the legitimate companionship of your friends, but the only safe or possible outlet for your affection — and I know you must express that in one way or another — is in the direction of your children. I'm not criticizing your present relations with them: I have no doubt that they are receiving better care than you could possibly give them yourself, but it is hired care. I'm really not thinking of them in this matter at all. For your own sake let them be the great object of life for you, and make all else become subordinate. Be with them when they're disagreeable as well as when they're angelic; see how patient you can be, and test yourself at every point. Make them love you more than Susette or any one else in the world, and see how jealous you will become of having already lost so much in their childish development. And then, best of all, see how quickly your life will respond to that love which they will give back to you, see how the little fingers will twine themselves around your heart-strings, and see

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how much strength those tiny hands possess to help you bear the disappointments which are bound to come. This is the solution, Lucy, — this is your salvation. Will you work it out?"

"Let me go now, Ned," she answered, furtively wiping her eyes. "If you don't, we shall have a scene here which we never can explain to Margaret — or to any one else."

With an effort she regained her composure, and with a smile, different from any that Cunningham had ever seen upon her face, she looked full into his eyes.

"Ned," she said firmly, "you are the finest man I know, and I wish Margaret could hear me say that I love you as I never loved any one; yet it is an affection which she would be proud to have another woman acknowledge for her husband. I love you for your strength, your courage, your judgment, your friendship. I can't tell you what I will do — I don't know myself, — but I'll try to be the woman I ought to be to deserve a friend like you. I won't take you back to the office. I want to go home now and fix every word you've said so firmly in my heart that I never can forget a single one. Goodbye."

There was no word spoken as they passed quietly out of the dining-room to the side door on Tremont Street, where the motor awaited them. Cunningham helped Lucy into the tonneau and waved a pleased farewell as the car turned up Boylston Street in response to her instructions.

WHEN Lucy had replied to Auchester's question that her feeling of mortification at her husband's manner of living came only when the fact was laid bare with particular emphasis, she really believed that no important change in the situation had taken place. As a matter of fact, it was not until this summer that Spencer had felt himself to be coming into his own. Up to this time he had hung onto the fringe of several little cliques in the clubs to which he belonged, without being an integral part of any one of them, but with the advent of Auchester, and through his popularity, he found himself firmly intrenched among a select number of congenial spirits who believed that real life consisted in touching only the high places. It was curious that the Captain should have been the unconscious means to this end, for he found these particular friends of Vallie too rapid for a man of even his experience, and he associated with them only when to avoid them would have appeared an affront. A remark which he had overheard in the club that "Eustis was too much of a speed-boy to be possible as a constant companion" exactly described his feelings toward them; but Spencer in their company was enjoying life to the utmost.

The change which all this occasioned in him was only

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beginning to make itself apparent. Until now, while living his own life, such as it was, he had been essentially a negative factor in his own household. Lucy long since had ceased to depend on him for anything beyond that respectability which a husband is supposed to confer upon a woman by giving her the right to bear his name. It was seldom that she consulted him or interfered with his plans except when they conflicted with some social engagement which she thought wise to accept together. At such times Vallie was likely to fume a little, or more if the disappointment was greater; but there never was a doubt in Lucy's mind that he would be ready to accompany her at the appointed hour.

On the other hand, Spencer made no criticism of his wife's friends or of her manner of living. While others were free to take exceptions, he was gratified rather than annoyed by the rumors of other men's reported infatuation for her, considering it an indirect compliment to himself. There was no question in his mind that Lucy was quite capable of taking care of herself, having witnessed the ease with which she managed him. He had found her a comfortable wife to live with, as she asked few questions, and made no objections to the constantly increasing overdrafts upon her income beyond the liberal allowance which her father, before his death, had stipulated should be his maximum. All in all, until now, it had been a "comfortable" arrangement, and he himself was as surprised as any one to discover, after a few weeks' life with the "speed-boys," that he was becoming discontented.

It was nearly noon when he came down stairs on the morning Auchester departed after the enlightening weekend. He felt disagreeable and generally out of sorts, and

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his first annoyance was to discover that Lucy had gone to town. Not that he was particularly anxious to see her, but as even the children had been taken to the beach by the ever-watchful Susette, there was no one left in the house upon whom to vent his ill-humor except the servants, and he could find no vast amount of amusement in that. His second annoyance came while he was sitting disconsolate in a shady corner of the piazza, trying to focus his attention upon the morning paper. Why the fool maid should not have known better than to bring him a tray bearing a carefully prepared breakfast, when he had been debating with himself for an hour whether or not a bottle of French vichy would be too hearty, was more than he could understand. And to cap the climax the morning mail, which he had only now found strength and energy enough to open, contained a notice that his bank account was overdrawn, and under ordinary circumstances he would not dare to draw again on Lucy's account for ten days or so, lest she should begin to take notice.

"They're a bunch of welchers," he exclaimed aloud, as his mind with some difficulty ran back over the checks he had drawn during the past few days. "They must have run right up to the bank Saturday morning and deposited. Afraid of 'em, eh? That's what they are, — a bunch of welchers!"

This completed the consignment of all whom he could call to mind at that time except the Captain, and he was not to escape. Spencer was conscious from a number of unimportant happenings during Auchester's visit that the friendship of which he had been so proud was waning; and of course it was the Captain's fault. It was plain to him, as he thought matters over carefully in the clear light of the morning, that Auchester had used him as a

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stepping-stone to his own advancement. Now that he had made his own friends, and was accepted because of his own personality, he was ready to kick the ladder from beneath his feet. This was the basest treachery of all, and it became blacker as Spencer dwelt upon it. He would assert himself. He would be the head of his household, he would tell other people what to do, instead of allowing himself to be pulled hither and thither and finally treated as a discard by a man who owed his position in America to what he, his friend, had been willing to do for him. As for the money, it belonged to him as much as it did to Lucy, and there was enough of it to put him beyond the need of any such humiliating worry. Lucy had made no objection as yet, but of course that would be the next step, and he was prepared to meet it.

The automobile and Lucy returned between three and four in the afternoon. Vallie had been expecting her for hours, and his vigil had not improved his temper, but it had added to his determination. At first he had decided to meet the car at the steps and to issue an ultimatum on the spot. From this point he veered to that of the injured husband, and by the time he heard the machine running up the driveway he had selected the rôle of the neglected invalid, sorely in need of sympathy and care, as the most effective expedient.

Lucy came into the hallway, pulled aside the hangings at the door of the living-room in which Vallie was lying, stretched out miserably upon the couch, turned aside without remark, and started up the stairs.

"Lucy," Spencer called, when it became apparent that she was passing out of hearing.

She paused, half-way up the stairs. "Well," she called back, "what is it?"

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"I want to see you," the voice continued.

"I can't stop now; I'm looking for the children."

"Lucy," the voice demanded, more peremptorily.

Surprised by the tone she retraced her steps and again stood in the doorway. "Is anything the matter?" she inquired.

"I'm sick," he said, his head falling back on the comfortable pillow he had placed beneath it.

"That doesn't surprise me any," she remarked. "What do you suggest, a doctor or a stomach pump? Why don't you have Victor telephone for you? Do you know where the children are?"

"No," he replied, assuming a sitting position, "I don't know where anybody or anything is. Why did you go away this morning?"

"Why?" Lucy echoed, surprised. "There isn't any why. I just did it."

"I needed the car to get to my office."

Lucy smiled. "Weren't the trains running, Vallie?"

"You're trying to be disagreeable," he retorted; "I won't stand for it."

"You'd better go back up stairs and sleep it off," she replied indulgently. "I'm in an angelic humor, but I want to see Larry and Babs."

Spencer made two or three further efforts to bring about a discussion, but Lucy refused to take his remarks with sufficient seriousness to become annoyed, so his abuse of her gave him no greater satisfaction than his browbeating of the servants. Finally she made her escape to the floor above, while he retired to the piazza to complete his sulk.

"Where are my children?" Lucy demanded, entering the governess' room and startling all three by her un-

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expected question. Seeing herself at the end of her quest, she seated herself in a great chair and held out her arms. "Come to mother," she said.

"I haven't done anything," Larry protested, hanging back, while Babs promptly burst into tears and flew for protection to Susette.

Lucy's color heightened at the repulse, but Ned had cautioned her to be patient. "Of course you haven't done anything, my darlings," she said propitiatingly. "Come to mother and tell her what game you are playing."

Larry looked questioningly at Susette, and then slowly obeyed. Lucy was indignant that he seemed to require the governess' permission and encouragement. "When I tell you to come to me, Larry, you don't need to look at Susette. Come at once."

The hesitation in Larry's steps increased and Babs' sobs became louder.

"For Heaven's sake stop that child's crying!" Lucy exclaimed.

"But you frighten them, madame," the governess explained.

"Frighten them? — their own mother frighten them? It's perfectly ridiculous!"

"But they have seen you so little, madame. One must be gentle —"

"I never heard anything so absurd," Lucy cried, rising and thoroughly at her wits' end. "They have never been afraid of me."

"No, madame; but you have never come to them like this before. They have only seen you for a moment at a time or at the table, and now they think you are angry with them."

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"Then I suppose I must take lessons in the proper way to approach my own children," she replied. She turned suddenly to Larry. "Are you afraid of me?" she demanded.

"Yes, mamma."

"And you?" turning to Babs; but the only response was a dismal wail as the little girl buried her head in Susette's arms.

Lucy left the room without further remark and took refuge in her own. "And these are to be my salvation!" she exclaimed bitterly. "This is the solution to my problem!"

She threw herself at full length upon the divan at the foot of her bed and thought for a long time. Suddenly an idea came to her which caused her to spring to her feet and brought back the smile to her face. "Dear old Ned," she said half-aloud. "He meant it for the best, and I have no doubt he believed it; but he hasn't any children, so of course he couldn't know. That was his legal advice! It's a good joke on Ned, — I must tell him about it.'

XI

VALLIE'S recovery from his "attack" dated from the moment when his intellect, as he was pleased to call it, came to a full realization that for the present it was a physical impossibility to stir things up with Lucy to the point of creating the "scene" which his sense of injured importance really craved. He was perfectly familiar with her varying humors, and the special one which had happened to possess her when he tried to make her angry was, he knew, invulnerable, and likely to lead on to ridicule and personal humiliation. Spencer's most promising faculty was a fairly accurate knowledge of his own limitations, and in his present condition he was well aware that Lucy would be more than his match in any sort of an encounter. Having arrived at this conclusion his mind then turned to Auchester. He would like to have matters out with him, but the chances of finding this opportunity for several days to come were too remote to afford even momentary relief. This process of elimination left the habitués of Eustis' yacht the sole remaining objects of his resentment, and his thought of them suggested immediate action.

With an agility remarkable for an invalid, Spencer ordered the car and went up stairs to attire himself for his sally forth against the windmills. Lucy heard him

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rushing around and came to the door of her room just as he reached the head of the stairs on his way out.

"Feeling better, darling?" she queried, with a mischievous smile which made her words particularly offensive.

"I can take care of myself, since I have to," he replied in an injured tone, continuing down the stairs.

"All right," she called out after the retreating figure. "But, Vallie dear, if you feel another of those attacks coming on, get somewhere out of sight, for you're not a sweet thing to look at." But the slamming door was the only evidence Lucy had that her words reached him.

He found Eustis and Clapp sitting on the broad piazza of The Yacht Club, half-reclining in great easy-chairs and lazily watching the kaleidoscopic activity among the great fleet of pleasure boats, big and little, as they came to their moorings and dropped sail, or cleared away in the twilight.

"Hullo, Vallie," Eustis greeted him; "we weren't looking for you tonight and thought we'd have to scurry around to get a fourth man."

"Why didn't you expect me?" he demanded, drawing up a chair.

Eustis looked at Clapp and both men laughed. "You came near getting drowned last night," Eustis replied. "I didn't suppose you could take so much on board and revive under forty-eight hours."

"Perhaps the Captain had a restorative in his jeans," Clapp suggested.

"Cut it out," Spencer said shortly. "I'm sick of all this jollying. Do you fellows mind dining early?"

His companions again looked at each other and smiled significantly.

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"We must wait for Miller," Eustis said, glancing at his watch. "He'll be down on the 5.15 train. Can you hold out for an hour?"

"I suppose I can, if I have to."

"Have a highball while you're waiting," Clapp added. Spencer made a wry face. "Not for a thousand dollars. I haven't eaten a thing since last night. I'm in a beastly humor."

"We noticed that," Eustis admitted. "Did your beautiful lady make rings around you when you came to?"

"No; I didn't see her until this afternoon."

"Then the Captain must have made you get up to see him off."

"Wrong again," Vallie replied wearily. "Lucy took him to town in the motor."

"Hum!" Eustis raised his eyebrows. "That must have reconciled the Captain to a fairly tedious week-end."

Spencer's weariness vanished. "I don't get you," he said. "Why don't you think Auchester enjoyed himself?"

Eustis laughed as he lit a fresh cigarette. "Don't be a chump, Vallie," he replied. "You don't think Auchester tags you around like this because he likes the color of your eyes, do you?"

The conclusions which Spencer had drawn during the morning regarding Auchester's ingratitude came back to him with redoubled force. So others had noticed it! This was a source of satisfaction, for it confirmed the logic of his own thoughts, and Eustis was admitted to be a clever man.

"No," he replied with decision. "Auchester hasn't put anything over on me. He's got all he can out of me, and now he thinks his own legs will carry him."

"You mean at the clubs?" Eustis asked.

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"Yes. I introduced him all around, and now he's ready to shake me."

"Oh, I don't think that of the Captain," Clapp protested. "What has he done to make you think so?"

"He hasn't done anything, but Eustis agrees with me, so that proves it."

"But I don't agree with you," Eustis remarked calmly. "Auchester is a devilish fine fellow, and he'd make his way anywhere, introductions or not, on his own shape. I don't mean that at all; but if I'm any judge he was bored stiff and was tugging at the leash all the time he was over here to get with some one who could talk his language, — and at the end of his visit you gave him his chance, for which he should be duly grateful, as I have no doubt he is."

"Then you think he cultivates me on Lucy's account?"

"Why not? A wife like that is the surest guarantee of any man's popularity."

"That's why we all love you, Vallie," added Clapp. "Even I would accept an invitation for a week-end; but I should make certain stipulations in advance which the Captain evidently overlooked."

"Do you suggest —"

"Nothing, my dear boy," Clapp interposed, "nothing in the world except that Lucy is all to the merry, and entirely competent to take care of herself. It does you great credit that with all the attention she gets from the rest of us she still stands for you. Take it from me, it's most complimentary to the attractiveness which you must display in your own home. There's Miller; now you can fill up that aching void."

Vallie remembered, as he saw Miller, that he had as yet made no reference to the one cause of resentment

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which he entertained against these particular friends. Eustis and Clapp, he now recalled, had not been to the city since the evening when the bridge had been all his party, so Miller must have been the one to deposit the checks which had caused the overdraft. He was somewhat distant, therefore, in greeting the late arrival, so much so, in fact, that his attitude was noticed by all.

"What's wrong, old chap?" Miller demanded.

"You were in a devilish hurry to deposit those checks of mine," he said bluntly.

"Hurry to do what?" Miller failed to understand.

"I gave you fellows some good fat checks Friday night, and now the bank notifies me that my account is overdrawn. I don't suppose you cared to take a chance on them?"

The three men glanced at each other significantly, while Eustis passed his hand over Spencer's forehead.

"I told you that you were nearly drowned last night, Vallie," he insisted. "Better wear overshoes tonight."

"I've asked you a civil question and I'm entitled to an answer," Vallie replied with great dignity.

"Did the bank send you down the checks?" Miller asked.

"No; of course not. The notice was enough."

Miller drew out his pocket-book and Eustis and Clapp did the same. Each held up a small piece of paper.

"Here are the 'checks,'" Clapp remarked. "I never tried to cash an I. O. U. at the bank, but perhaps it would go through all right."

Spencer regarded the three slips of paper dubiously. "Then I didn't give you fellows checks?" he asked.

"Not so that you'd notice it," Eustis rejoined. "Looks to me as if the orders were on you, — mine's a lone tree."

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"Then how the devil is the account overdrawn?" he puzzled. "I must have drawn some other checks."

"There you have it!" exclaimed Miller. "There goes that Websterian brain working overtime! Vallie, you're a wonder!"

The dinner passed off without incident. Spencer's spirits revived as it progressed, and he congratulated himself that he had said nothing nasty regarding the checks before the real facts had been disclosed. The dining-room, looking out onto the commodious piazza, was gay with the sprinkling of yachting suits worn by the men and the radiant summer costumes displayed by the women, who came with their escorts from the many cottages surrounding the harbor. Outside, the whistles of the steam yachts and the creaking of the sails from those smaller boats which found anchorage near the club landing suggested the occupation of the evening, and through the long open windows an occasional whiff of the east breeze brought the bracing salt air which served to flavor the food and to give invigoration to the conversation.

Later, the little tender took the men on board the "Sylph," where the card-table was already set up on the after-deck, and few preparations were necessary to begin the evening's play. Vallie's luck had consistently run against him for some time, and tonight he determined to make a killing.

"Let's double the stakes," he suggested as they sat down.

"Not for me," Miller protested; "ten a point is my limit."

"Give me a chance to get back those I. O. U's," Vallie pleaded.

"But one of us has to cut you for a partner," Clapp explained.

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Even Spencer could see the strength of this reasoning, so the cards were cut, and Miller drew to play with him. "I'll take an extra with you, Eustis," Vallie continued, seeing another chance to recoup.

"All right," assented the willing Eustis. "If your account is overdrawn I might as well let you win back this I. O. U. as have it go to seed. Your deal, Vallie."

"No trump," Spencer bid, as soon as the hands were sorted.

"Two clubs," came from Eustis.

"Content," from Miller.

"Content," Clapp echoed.

"Two no trumps," Spencer raised his bid after a moment's hesitation.

"Double," Eustis exclaimed promptly.

Vallie looked up sharply into an aggravatingly smiling face.

"Want to take it back?" Eustis asked tauntingly.

"We'll let you, — it's like taking candy from children."

"Go ahead and lead," Spencer retorted ill-humoredly, when the bidding ceased.

"No; I don't think I will." Eustis laid his hand down on the table. "Let's have a new deal."

"What is this, — bumblepuppy?" Miller inquired.

"I have a good reason," insisted Eustis.

"Go ahead and play," Vallie urged. "I know what I'm doing."

"All right," was the yielding answer. "But if we win, the score on this hand doesn't count."

"Where do I come in?" Clapp remarked significantly.

"Aren't you making rather free with my money?"

"You wouldn't mind contributing something toward teaching Vallie how to play auction, would you?" Eustis

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responded confidently, leading a heart, which developed a fatal weakness on the part of his opponents in that particular suit.

"Of all the rotten luck!" Spencer cried disgustedly as the last card fell and he found himself set two tricks. "That was fool luck, Eustis, and you must admit it. I had your clubs stopped, and there was no reason in the world to think you would lead hearts."

"It wasn't all luck," Eustis protested quietly, as he nonchalantly shuffled the cards and waited.

"Doesn't the score stand?" inquired Clapp.

"I'll bet you fifty dollars you can't give any sane reason for that lead," Spencer interrupted, unconvinced.

"Make it a hundred and I'll go you."

"All right," Vallie exclaimed, reaching for his pocket-book.

"Your pocket-book won't help you any," Eustis still taunted him. "Get out your pencil and a piece of paper. Are you sure your I. O. U. is any good?"

"Do you mean that?" Spencer exclaimed hotly.

"No," was the laughing answer; "go ahead. Who is to settle the bet?"

"I'll leave it to Miller and Clapp."

"All right. I doubled and led hearts because you exposed your hand when you lit your cigarette, — I couldn't help seeing it. How'll that do for a sane reason?"

"Damn!" Spencer muttered, as the shouts of the two other men announced their award.

"Now you savvy why the score doesn't stand, and all bets are off, too. But I say, Vallie, for Heaven's sake get some one to teach you the game. No wonder you lose all the time."

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Spencer made no reply, but sullenly sorted the hand Eustis dealt him, and the game continued with results which varied for three of the players, but his ill-luck followed him steadily. When the scores were finally added, he was the only loser.

"It's all your party again, Vallie," Miller announced, "and Eustis is high man."

"I seem to be paying the expenses of the yacht," was the discouraged answer. "I haven't won a rubber that was worth anything since we started in Friday night."

"Take a few lessons and see if that won't help some." Eustis again volunteered advice, but Spencer was in no mood to receive it.

"I wouldn't need them if I had your hands," he retorted. "The winner isn't necessarily the best player by any means."

"Take that home and play it over on your piano," laughed Clapp.

"Don't knock, — come right in," Eustis replied good-naturedly.

"Auction is a rotten game," Spencer said, rising from his seat. "I don't see why any one ever plays it."

XII

MARGARET had seen Lucy a number of times during the summer, and the result of their pact had been to draw them much closer together; still Margaret felt that little progress had actually been made in bringing her to a point where her impulses were really under control. The earlier prejudice the older woman had formed disappeared with closer acquaintance. Lucy annoyed her frequently by word or deed which seemed foolish or ill-advised, at times she exasperated her with some unexpected folly completely at variance with well-meant resolutions; but in spite of all, Margaret could not help loving her, and had really come to regard her, as Cunningham did, in the light of a high-strung, head-strong child. Yet, strange to say, Lucy seemed able to walk the narrow edge of the danger line with such absolute confidence and security that Margaret's admonitions lost much of the force they would have possessed had she been able to point her finger at a single disastrous slip. Lucy's claim, that what Margaret and Ned called "indiscretions" were of such a nature that they could harm no one except herself, appeared to be substantiated by the facts, and as her episode with Cunningham, which she considered the nearest she had ever come to a real mistake, had actually resulted in a friendship which she would

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not otherwise have had, it was difficult for her to draw real lessons from her experiences.

Cunningham had derived the inspiration of his suggestion to Lucy, that her children must form the solution of her problem, from the conversation over the Sunday night supper when Langdon and Hayden were at his house. He had not thought to make the specific application until Lucy's unexpected luncheon with him had forced him to crystallize into actual words the subconscious impression this conversation had left upon his mind. When he returned home that evening he recounted to Margaret the day's adventure, and urged upon her to follow up the seed which he knew, from Lucy's attitude as they separated, had been planted in fertile ground. This explained the particular occasion of Margaret's visit to Beverly Farms a few days after Lucy's first attempt to take the children into her life.

The rebuff the children had given their mother had resulted only in temporary mortification and an injured pride. The main point which stood out above all others was that Ned, the famous legal authority, Ned the infallible, Ned the dear, well-meaning friend, had shown himself to be mortal like the rest. He could guide a client through the intricate mazes of the law's confusion, he could sway the masses with his eloquence in furthering some civic cause, he could command the mighty to stand still and listen to his words, but when it came to the solution of a wretched little woman's perplexities he was just an ordinary man, whose judgment in all to do with women is always wrong! Not that she blamed him; on the contrary she felt drawn even closer by this evidence that he had not acquired the prerogatives of the superman.

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Lucy had not given up the experiment after the first trial, but its continuance was not due to the same motive which had prompted its beginning. That incident she considered closed, but she was determined that Susette should not be left in the undisputed position of being the only one to whom the children turned. Unfortunately, her efforts had been along the line of least resistance, and already results were apparent which bade fair to undo the training which the careful governess had effected. Larry no longer hung back when his mother called him, Babs felt no desire to weep in Susette's arms; both came eagerly to her with outstretched hands and expectant hearts for the presents and indulgences with which she now surfeited them. Lucy discovered that they were "little angels" so long as their childish whims were not obstructed, and she made it a point to leave all the obstructing to Susette.

It had proved an agreeable diversion, and Lucy was quite ready to discuss the subject with Margaret when it was adroitly introduced into the conversation.

"Don't tell Ned," Lucy insisted, "for I'm saving it to tell him myself, but it is really the greatest joke in the world on him. He hasn't much faith in poor little me, so he was trying to think out some 'salvation,' as he called it, and it suddenly occurred to him that the children would be just the thing. Then he talked and talked to me about it while we were having luncheon together — I do wish you might have been there too, Margaret, — and you know the way it is when Ned gets interested! If you will believe me, he almost had me crying, and I couldn't wait to get back here to do just what he said. But —"

Lucy laughed at the recollection.

"But what, Lucy?" Margaret urged.

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"Well, Ned hadn't talked to the children as he had to me, so they didn't fully appreciate the 'salvation' business. Larry balked and Babs howled, and altogether we had a very messy time. At first I was provoked enough, but when I came to think it over I realized how absurd the whole thing was. How could Ned, of all people, dear boy that he is, possibly know anything about children when he never has had any of his own? It's the old maid in the 'mothers' meetings,' you know, who always has the latest theories as to raising children. Don't think I'm making light of what Ned said, Margaret, for I do appreciate his interest, but it's so seldom any one of us gets a joke on him, he's usually such a very wise person."

"But I don't agree with you that the 'joke' is on Ned," Margaret replied seriously; "and what is more, I don't think there is any joke about it at all."

"You don't!" Lucy exclaimed with genuine surprise; "you still think, after all I've told you, that I can get any kind of life by associating just with Larry and Babs? Why, Margaret, dear, remember, — they're only little children."

"I know," Margaret replied quietly, frankly disappointed, taking Lucy's hand in both of hers, "and you are only a child yourself. Have you never, during these years of motherhood, felt that there could be no companionship equal to that given by these little creatures, — companionship in their early helplessness, in their later development day by day into distinct personalities, in combating the growth of our own faults, which we see duplicated in their tiny compositions, in encouraging those better traits which we also recognize belong to them by right of inheritance. Have you never felt this, dear, during the years since Larry was born?"

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"Not just that," Lucy admitted thoughtfully. "Of course I have been terribly worried about them when they have been ill, and I have always insisted on being with them at such times; but they are quiet then, and I can love them and take care of them. When they are well they don't really need me, and I can't endure them when they fuss."

"They need you even more when they are well," Margaret insisted with a patient smile. "In their illnesses they have the best of professional care, and your presence is due, as you say, more to your anxiety than to their requirements. Can't you see that while their little bodies may be perfectly well, their minds may need a mother's care just as desperately? Character is forming every day in those tiny brains, and who is shaping it? Susette? Very well, — are you satisfied to have the character building restricted to the limitations of a governess, no matter how good a one she may be?"

"You and Ned are both inconsistent," Lucy replied uncomfortably. "You think I am lacking in character, yet you urge me to expose my children to that very influence which you are trying to correct."

"Didn't Ned tell you that in his advice he had you in mind more than the children?"

"Yes; but that means to sacrifice them for my good."

"Not at all, my dear. Neither Ned nor I think that you lack character, but we do think that you sometimes fail to express it in the wisest way. What he meant, and I agree with him, is that you couldn't give of yourself to those darling children without expressing that which at the present time nothing calls forth."

"You are just as bad as Ned." Lucy forced a laugh to relieve the tension. "How can you know so much about these things without being a mother yourself?"

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Margaret winced, and Lucy sprang forward as she saw the pain in her face. "Forgive me, dear," she said softly. "I didn't mean to hurt you."

There was a moment's silence, during which Margaret forced back the tears which came to her eyes. "You didn't know," she replied, "but we had a baby once, and perhaps the only reason Ned and I have never spoken of it is because its loss was so great a sorrow to us both. We do know what it means, Lucy, and when we see the opportunity so close at hand for you to find the happiness which is denied to us, do you wonder that we urge it on you?"

"I didn't know, — forgive me, dear," Lucy said, sobered by what Margaret had just told her. "There must be something lacking in me," she continued at length, speaking more to herself than to her companion. "I love them and I'm proud of them, but I have never in all my life had any desire to be with them when they were not in good humor. It's another evidence of selfishness, I'm afraid; but I don't know how to act toward them in any different way."

For a long moment Margaret sat looking at her, discouraged by her inability to touch the spring which should bring the latent mother-love to the surface, — for she knew it must be there. She believed that Lucy honestly yearned to discover it in herself, not even yet realizing the priceless value of the treasure she sought. Margaret's heart bled for her, and she felt the pity of it all far more than Lucy herself. She leaned over and kissed her tenderly upon the forehead.

"Some day," she told her, "some day you will look back and wonder that it was ever possible for you to say that. Some day you will hear within you a voice from

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Heaven which will make it clear. Until then all your friends can do is to hope."

"I know it," she answered frankly; yet by the tone of her voice Margaret knew that she utterly failed to comprehend. "And the fact that the friends do hope helps me to believe that it will be as you say. But the friends must be patient, Peggy dear. After twenty-eight years of doing exactly what I've wished, you and Ned can't expect to reform me right away, can you? Why — you've only been working on me for six weeks!"

XIII

THE Montgomery case was but one of several unusually important matters which had caused Cunningham to decide that it was necessary for him to remain close to his office until after the first of September. Margaret preferred the more simple social life of the South Shore to the more elaborate forms of summer entertainment prevalent among the fashionable colonies extending from Beverly to Gloucester, and this was the first year they had not closed their town house and occupied their "cottage" at Marion. Cunningham had urged her not to allow his necessities to occasion any change in her usual plans, but Margaret, with a devotion so characteristic that her husband accepted it as a matter of course, refused to consider any summer plans which did not include him. He promised her the week-ends, but felt that the daily trip back and forth on the train would take from him more time and strength than at present he could afford to give.

Yet the experiment had not required so much of a sacrifice in comfort as Margaret had expected. Much to her surprise the city, which she as well as others deserted year after year as a matter of course, was not without its attractions as a summer resort. The days were hot, but by evening it was the exception when the east breeze did

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not relieve all torrid suggestion; and what watering-place can guarantee more! The motor made it possible for them to enjoy new experiences together, for they rarely dined twice at the same place; and their week-end excursions acquainted them with other delightful spots which until now they had known only by name. Freedom from social requirements gave her a thoroughly enjoyed opportunity for quiet reading far beyond any she had ever found, and best of all, Cunningham had promised that the month of September should be all hers to plan out as she thought best, with his business responsibilities thrown one side. It had been long since she had enjoyed with him so extended a holiday, and the anticipation of this made the summer plans even more attractive than ever.

To Langdon the summer meant the Montgomery case and nothing else. He realized fully that this was his opportunity, and his office associates relieved him of less important matters so that he might work uninterrupted upon this. And the results of his investigations gave him great encouragement. As the case presented itself to him, his client must be guilty unless a third party could be introduced into the tragedy, so he began his work with the fictitious hypothesis that this third party really existed. With this as a basis he carefully went over the ground from the point where the witness testified to the shots in the buggy and the spot where the horse was finally stopped by the interlocking wheels. This represented a distance of over a mile, and Langdon hit upon a theory that the vehicle might have held three persons at the time the shots were fired, and that the real assassin would have had ample opportunity to leave the buggy at some point before the bridge was reached, starting the horse again upon its way after making good his escape.

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With this in mind Langdon sharply cross-examined Montgomery, and to his surprise and gratification the man, with seeming reluctance, finally admitted that the hypothesis was correct. There was a third person in the buggy, he said, at the time the shots were fired, but he had made no reference to it as it really did not bear upon the case. The third person, Montgomery insisted, was in no way involved, as it was Brewster who fired the shots. Nothing could move him from his position, so Langdon was forced to accept the situation, bringing to bear all his force of argument to convince his client of the value which the testimony of this third person would be in establishing his own innocence. But Montgomery was surly:

"I don't want to bring her into it," he said shortly.

"Then it was a woman!" Langdon exclaimed, delighted by the unexpected information.

"What if it was?" the man retorted, angry with himself for having let the words slip.

This was the extent of the information Langdon was able to drag from him, in spite of several interviews. Montgomery at last refused even to reply to his interrogations, evidently not trusting himself since his unfortunate admission. But his champion determined to save him in spite of himself, and proud to have uncovered something which the office of the Attorney-General had failed to find, devoted his entire time and energy to the discovery of the mysterious woman, who, he felt certain, held in her possession the solution to the crime.

The three motives for which the police search in the unraveling of any mystery are woman, money, and revenge. Thus far in the Montgomery case all three were lacking, but Langdon's discovery that a woman was in

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the buggy with these men offered the possibility of finding at least two of the motives actually in existence. Whether or not success in locating the woman would result in clearing his client or in making his plight more desperate, Langdon could not foresee; in the latter event, being forewarned would enable him to defend Montgomery with greater effect, even though the evidence against him was actually strengthened.

Langdon still found it difficult to accept Cunningham's high moral attitude as necessarily the proper basis for his own practice of law. He admitted it theoretically and respected Cunningham more than ever as he came into actual knowledge of the consistency with which he lived up to his ideals. Of course it was all right for him to do it, for he had attained a position where such a reputation formed a real business asset. Clients knew that to have Cunningham accept retainers and plead their cases was an assurance to the Court and to the jury that he, at least, had already sat as master and had decided in their favor. Cunningham could pick and choose his cases, and the moral effect of his appearance for his client was such as to warrant the size of the fees which he charged for his professional services. Langdon was sufficiently familiar with these facts to be aware that idealism, in this case at least, could be made eminently practical, and he wondered to himself if Cunningham was not also aware of it. Not that he doubted his sincerity: no man could know Cunningham and doubt that; but had he not argued so long for other people that unconsciously he had persuaded himself? Such things had happened, and history is never averse to repeating itself.

In the present instance, with its later developments, Langdon felt it to be a decided advantage to himself to

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have Cunningham opposed to him in the Montgomery case. From the conversation they had already had, it was evident that his single purpose was to secure justice, and it was certain that he would aid the defense if Langdon could introduce evidence sufficient to show even reasonable doubt as to the prisoner's guilt. This Landgon believed he was now able to do, especially as he felt confident that he would succeed in locating the unknown woman.

It was with a sense of personal elation, together with a desire to have Cunningham realize that he had accomplished something, that he asked his friend for an appointment to discuss the situation in its newest aspect. The request came opportunely, as the older man had been on the point of sending for Langdon for the same purpose, but had been prevented by other unexpected claims upon his time. Now other appointments shaped themselves around this one definitely made, and Cunningham gave his caller a cordial welcome.

"Well, Tom," he said lightly, "the State has been viewing your activity in this case with apprehension, and begins to fear that you will rob its insatiate thirst for blood of a most promising victim. You wouldn't do that, would you?"

Langdon laughed. "Not without supplying it with another," he said. "The State isn't going to be fussy about that, I hope."

"Oh, no!" Cunningham assented. "So long as there is no danger of having to give up our little party we shall find no fault. How much do you want to tell me of the situation as it stands today?"

"Everything," was the frank response. "Until our talk at your house I should have held back what I knew

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until the trial, and then have thrown it into the prosecution to weaken their case; but from what you said then I have concluded that our interests are really identical."

"I believe they are," Cunningham said seriously.

"What the State wishes, as I understand it," Langdon continued, "is the conviction of the person or persons who killed Brewster, — not necessarily the conviction of Montgomery?"

"Exactly."

"Then I believe that I can show that it was not necessarily Montgomery, but possibly a third person, as yet unknown, who fired those shots."

Cunningham manifested unmistakable interest. "That is a big step forward in the defense," he said.

"I know it is," Langdon replied, "and I knew you would be pleased. You said, you remember, that if I was able to show you that Brewster could have been shot by any one other than my client you would help clear Montgomery."

"Did I say just that?" Cunningham questioned. "I thought I said that in the event you speak of the prosecution would assist the defense."

"Well, that's the same thing, isn't it?"

"Not quite. Granting that you can show the possibility of some one else being the assassin, it still remains to show that reasonable doubt exists that the defendant committed the crime."

"There were three persons in that buggy, Ned, at the time of the murder." Langdon was purposely abrupt in his announcement, as he had promised himself the satisfaction of witnessing his friend's surprise.

"Indeed!" Cunningham was genuinely pleased with

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the progress of Langdon's work, and he did not hesitate to show it. "You are convinced of this?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Do you know who the third man was?"

"It was a woman."

"Good!" Cunningham's face beamed and he held out his hand impulsively. "Tom, this case is going to make you, whichever way it turns out. Now tell me what your theory is."

"Of course it's all theory yet, — until I can find the woman," Langdon began, frankly gratified by Cunningham's evident approval; "but at all events it introduces the possibility that some one other than Montgomery did the shooting, and the curious direction taken by the bullets makes my theory stronger. I am working on the basis that the woman sat on the outside right-hand side, with Montgomery in the middle holding the reins. From that position she could have shot both men, and the similarity in the direction of the two shots explains what has been a mystery regarding Montgomery's wound. With one man dead and the other unconscious, she could easily have stopped the buggy long enough to get out and then start the horse again. Isn't that theory perfectly plausible?"

"Perfectly," Cunningham agreed. "But have you found any motive?"

"Not yet; but two men and a woman offer the eternal triangle."

"True; but the woman might have been merely the cause of the tragedy. Have you positive evidence that it was a woman?"

"Montgomery admitted it, under protest. I think he wants to shield her."

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"He actually admitted it?"

"Yes; under protest."

"He makes no accusations?"

"None. He won't give her name, and refuses to have her brought into the case."

Cunningham reflected for a moment. "What do you make out of that?" he asked.

"Either a fear that she will hurt his case or some consideration for her."

"If she had been the other man's accessory, he probably wouldn't hesitate to incriminate her, would he?"

"No; but he may be interested in her in spite of that. We've seen similar cases."

"If she had deliberately shot him he would hardly try to shield her?" Cunningham pursued, meditatively.

"I haven't carried it as far as that," Langdon admitted. "At present my job is to locate that woman. I think we shall know a whole lot more after I find her."

Again Cunningham became reflective, and Langdon thought his manner curious. Still it was evident that it showed approval.

"You're doing good work, Tom," Cunningham said at length. "This interview today demonstrates my claim that frankness between counsel is for mutual advantage when both are playing the game straight. What you tell me of Montgomery's admission that there was a woman in the buggy clears up several points. I tried to get the facts out of him and failed. Now I think perhaps I can reciprocate."

"There isn't much more to be done until I find the woman, is there?" Langdon inquired.

"That is where I can help you."

"How —" Langdon began, as Cunningham stepped

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to his desk and drew a sheet of paper from a large bundle, which he handed to his friend.

"What we've found out regarding this woman here seemed to indicate her connection with Montgomery, and what he admitted to you apparently corroborates it." It could hardly be a coincidence. Here is her name and address," he continued. "She is being shadowed, so she can't possibly get away. Later we will have her at the District-Attorney's office and talk things over together. I hope she will help prove your theory, but frankly I'm convinced that she will be the best witness the prosecution could possibly have."

Langdon's pride suffered from the discovery that the prosecution was ahead of him in locating the woman, but he was no less keenly alert to the favorable turn it gave to the position of the defense. "It's a lucky thing for that poor devil in Charles Street jail that he has a man like you on the other side," he said appreciatively.

Cunningham laughed. "It wasn't so long ago that you suggested it might be a handicap," he reminded him. "You said something about my 'uncanny power.' Go to, you rascal! Now I know it was nothing but blarney!"

"I did mean it," Langdon protested seriously; "I meant every word of it; but I didn't realize then that a case could be handled like this." He looked steadfastly at his companion for a moment, and his face gradually broke into a broad smile.

"Say, Ned," he suddenly exclaimed, holding out his hand, "the law is all right after all, isn't it?"

XIV

AUCHESTER had not seen Lucy since he said good-bye standing in front of the Badminton Club, after their morning run up from Beverly Farms together; but there had not been a day when she was not present in his thoughts. He hardly expected that she would remember her promise to telephone him, and until she did so he felt that he had no right to do anything which should remind her of it. Moreover, he was eager to see whether she would feel impelled to suggest another meeting, or, as other men who had performed their part in the day's entertainment, was he to be laid aside and forgotten unless accident again brought them together? As the days passed and no word came he remembered the casual way in which she turned from him to Cunningham on that same eventful morning. This thought caused him to tug once or twice at his heavy mustache, but he smiled in that fatalistic way common to soldiers and determined to consider her as an agreeable passing fancy, as she evidently considered him.

The Captain was in the habit of indulging in introspection, the result perhaps of his long army service. He was a man of action, yet every act was the result of pre-determination. He was a devotee of the beautiful, whether he found it in art, literature, or nature; and his brother's

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death, which placed him at the head of his ancestral house in England, also placed him unexpectedly in a position where he could gratify his tastes. His first interest in Lucy Spencer came from the fact that he considered her more beautiful than any woman he had ever seen, and he appreciated the privilege of admiring her exactly as if she had been a masterpiece of sculpture or of art. His second interest had been that of being amused, as he found her companionship highly entertaining; and finally he had reached the conclusion that in her he had discovered a woman whose code of life differed materially from that generally accepted by the world, but which exactly coincided with his own.

The one thing which the Captain was not, was a sentimentalist, and no one knew this better than himself. Thus it was that in his retrospection he had received something of a shock to discover that to the three distinct interests he had felt in Lucy there must now be added a fourth. Not that the new interest was as yet developed to appreciable proportions, but to discover the presence of a feeling toward her akin to affection was an event of sufficient importance to warrant more than passing attention. Under his code he did not consider the fact that she happened to be a married woman an insurmountable barrier, for in his mind the gentle art of divorce was instituted primarily for the purpose of permitting spirits which failed to discover congeniality in their first attempt to rectify early mistakes. The first point of vital significance was to determine absolutely his own attitude in the matter, and with this settled in the affirmative it only remained for him to ascertain whether or not Lucy's expressions were more than passing compliments. This conception of love seemed to

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him the highest form and the most certain to be enduring because based upon the intellect rather than upon propinquity or impulse.

After his discovery and a careful examination into its significance the Captain placed it one side for later reference if opportunity offered and judgment sanctioned. Knowing that it was there was a distinct safeguard against surprise. Yet when the message came inviting him to Beverly Farms he was interested and pleased to find that it was this fourth interest in his hostess which first expressed its satisfaction.

The invitation itself was the result of a sudden recollection on Lucy's part of a promise which as yet remained unfulfilled. The fortnight which had elapsed since Margaret's call, it must be confessed, had been most uninspiring. She was honestly affected by what Cunningham and Margaret had said to her, and she had tried faithfully to make a new life for herself along the lines they had suggested. She had the children with her every day, played with them, took them riding with her, and had them at table, and there was no doubt that through this greater familiarity she came to know them better and to enjoy them more. But the fact remained that it was a strain upon her which she found difficult to endure. No day passed without a "scene" of some kind with one or both of them, whenever it became necessary to have the routine depart from what they wished. The control which Susette had previously possessed was noticeably waning, and it was no longer certain that when Lucy turned them over to the governess, after her limitations had been reached, the tempest would come to a summary conclusion. By the time afternoon came Lucy retired to her room completely exhausted, unable even with

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closed doors to shut out the memory of the wails which had filled the house with the tragedies of childhood.

Her moments of relief during this same period were few. Spencer had been very little at the house, remaining away for days together, which was a new thing for him. Her lawyer had written twice, asking if she would make an appointment to talk over the question of her husband's drafts, but the letters remained upon her writing-desk unanswered. Archie Reed stopped at the house one afternoon to take her out in his new machine, but it happened to be at a time when she had thrown herself down with a splitting headache after an unusually violent experience with Larry, and she excused herself, only to regret it a moment after the car passed out of hearing.

It was impossible for her to continue without some sort of relaxation, and when her mind searched for the specific form she thought of Auchester and her promise. Surely there could be no "indiscretion" in a quiet afternoon's ride with the Captain, and she had made a promise, any way, which she was bound to keep. Neither Ned nor Margaret had suggested that she give up the world altogether. Ned, in fact, had spoken of the legitimate enjoyment of her friends, and this certainly came under that head.

As arranged over the telephone, Lucy met her guest at Pride's Crossing and then took the familiar shore road through Manchester and Magnolia to Gloucester. The afternoon was warm, but the breeze was off the water, which tempered the air delightfully. Lucy welcomed the Captain with a cordiality which, while restrained for her, yet evidenced a pleasure born of two weeks' seclusion; Auchester was experiencing the enjoyment of a moment which he had been anticipating for over a month.

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"You are looking tired," he said frankly after the formalities had been exchanged and the car was well under way.

"I am," she admitted. "This is almost the first relaxation I have had since I saw you last."

"That won't do," he continued, looking at her quickly. "I have no right to ask, but —"

"No; it hasn't been Vallie," she smiled, understanding his unspoken question. "As a matter of fact, I presume you have seen more of him lately than I have."

"I haven't seen him at all. I don't believe he has been in town, — I heard he was taking a vacation."

"Well, — perhaps he is; but he hasn't been home a dozen times since you were down here, so you mustn't blame him for my jaded appearance. To tell you the truth, I'm trying an experiment."

Auchester made no comment, but was obviously awaiting her further explanation.

"Yes," she continued; "I am trying to turn over a new leaf. I have been too unconventional and impulsive; now I shall be so matronly and sedate that you won't recognize me."

"Your freedom from the slavery of convention has been what I admired the most."

"I presume that is the very reason Ned thinks it dangerous," Lucy replied frankly.

"Ned? — Mr. Cunningham?" Auchester queried. "I don't understand. What has he to do with it?"

"Everything," she said naively. "Ned and Margaret, you know, are my most intimate friends. I thought I could make my own conventions so long as they affected no one except myself, but I have been persuaded that I am wrong."

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"What are your own conventions?"

"Oh, I never tried to put them into words, and perhaps it has been the disregard of what already exist rather than the making of really new ones, and my own."

"You believed that a woman ought to be allowed to express her personality as naturally as a man expresses his, — that was the main point, wasn't it?"

"Yes; it seems all wrong to me to say one thing and mean another. When I like a woman I don't hesitate to show it; why should I act differently with a man?"

"You can't get up any argument with me on that subject," Auchester assured her, "for I sympathize with you entirely. I see no reason why every one, regardless of sex, should not act himself. That was what I meant when I said that it was this which I so much admire in you. Don't let any one persuade you to give it up, I entreat."

"But I must," Lucy said with regret in her voice; "Ned is right in saying that this freedom leads on to misinterpretation, which a woman can't afford. Ned and I don't always agree, but he is never wrong."

"I envy Mr. Cunningham the closeness of his friendship," Auchester said.

"You needn't; I make him a lot of trouble."

"I do, even after what you say. I differ from him, but he is probably a safer guide than I, for I refuse to allow even the conventions of men to stand between me and what I believe to be right."

"How interesting!" Lucy exclaimed; "but I didn't know there were any conventions which men were expected to regard."

"Take that of marriage, for instance," Auchester continued. "To me the only sacred part of the sacrament is

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that which is not performed by man. The ceremony which is regarded binding is made necessary only to protect civil institutions. A man and a woman who love each other are married before God whether or not the actual ritual has been pronounced."

"What about a man and a woman who are married without loving each other?" Lucy asked quietly.

"All that exists in that case is a legal tie which is a mockery to have exist at all."

Neither one spoke for several moments. Auchester watched his companion carefully as she sat with her face averted, buried deep in thought. No one had ever put the matter before Lucy in just this light, and it was impossible for it to do other than strike home. Auchester intended it to do so, for with his renewed acquaintance his fourth interest had asserted itself. He knew that this woman sitting silently beside him, heedless of the passing panorama, represented to him the ideal of what he wished his wife to be. He held himself a man of honor, and life itself would never for a moment stand between that honor and its defense; but the simple fact that in the eyes of the law and of society this woman was bound to a man who himself disregarded the tie, in no way seemed to him an obligation which honor should respect. He was not a man to take an underhand advantage. He would fight in the open, just as he had always fought. When his country deemed it necessary to right a wrong by force of arms, all previously existing laws were cast aside except the one which the force of arms itself represented. It was a similar case now. Lucy Spencer was preordained for him and for no one else. Because a mistake had been made was no reason why it should stand forever. It all rested with her. If she loved him, then he would carry all else before

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him, take her back with him to England, and surround her with the life to which he believed she naturally belonged.

Lucy turned to him at length. "I suppose that does describe the relations between Vallie and me," she said, reverting to his last remark.

"It describes the relations of more married people than you or I have any idea of," Auchester replied; "and oh! the pity of it!"

She was silent again but for a shorter period. "I don't see any way to remedy it in my case without making things a great deal worse."

"Unless you met some one for whom you really cared," he said quickly; "then it would be comparatively simple."

She listened to his answer without remark, for her own words were but an echo from the flood of thought which their conversation had loosened. What had her married life ever meant to her? She had not considered it seriously from the first, rather accepting it as the conventional step to be taken at a certain point in the evolution of the girl into the woman. Yet she had taken the step before that point was reached, for she realized without crystalizing the thought that for her womanhood was only just being attained. Had she waited — but it was too late to consider that now.

So deeply was she absorbed that for the moment she forgot her companion. Mechanically, in order to recall herself to the present, she pressed her hand to her forehead, and then let it fall beside her. She was conscious that it rested upon Auchester's, yet she made no effort to remove it. Only when he gently pressed it did she come fully to herself.

"Unless you met some one for whom you really cared,"

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he repeated meaningly, bending his head a little closer to her face.

Lucy laughed consciously as she quickly withdrew her hand. "Do you think so?" she asked simply. "It isn't quite so clear to me. But after all," she added, with a return of her earlier smile, "it would be foolish to give our ride up to the consideration of any possibility as remote as that, wouldn't it?"

LAWYERS reserve to themselves the prerogative of postponing to suit their own convenience those questions which they prefer not to face at the moment, but clients have no such privilege. Lucy's attorney, an old-time friend of her father's, was not surprised that both his letters requesting an interview remained unanswered, for he had known her from childhood and had become familiar with certain of her peculiarities, but he had reached a point where a decision was imperative; so, wise man that he was, he trusted no longer to the mails or to the greater uncertainty of a woman's whims. As a still further evidence of his wisdom, he selected as the moment for his call at Beverly Farms the latter part of the morning — that time in a woman's day when she is rested from the fatigue of preparation and not as yet overcome by the necessity of exertion.

Lucy could have given no rational excuse for her failure to reply to his one-sided correspondence, but intuitively she associated the request for an interview with something unexpressed and unexplained which would prove disagreeable; and as a matter of principle she always fled from the unpleasant. There is a bird well-known to natural history which buries its head in the sand whenever it wishes to escape observation. Metaphorically Lucy resorted to the same expedient when she found her-

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self oppressed by a sense of impending discomfort. As long as she could avoid meeting trouble in any form she need not concern herself with its nature.

The first letter had incidentally referred to the drafts which Spencer had recently made against her estate, of which Mr. Amsden acted as trustee and adviser. The income had always sufficed to gratify every desire Lucy possessed, so she concerned herself little with the administration, looking upon the necessity of signing papers and agreeing to transfers as among those annoyances incidental to life, which her lawyer made as little irksome as possible. The property was divided into two parts, one being a trust fund, the income from which went directly to her husband, the principal reverting at his death to her or to the children; the balance stood in her name without restriction.

One of the trials experienced by the trustee was Lucy's unwillingness to keep the two accounts separate. For a number of years, Spencer had drawn for his personal expenditures considerably more than the income from the trust fund, but whenever the subject was brought to her attention she insisted that matters be allowed to run on as they were. Lucy abhorred disagreeing with any one, and she was disappointed that Mr. Amsden had not discovered how hard it really was for her to refuse his request to place everything upon a business basis. He had pointed out that this would not necessarily require the curtailing of her husband's expenditures, as she would still be quite free to turn over to him as large a share of her own income as she saw fit; but the present arrangement placed the executor in the predicament of assenting to something which was at variance with her father's desires as expressed in the will.

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This was undoubtedly the subject which Mr. Amsden had come to discuss, and Lucy was distinctly bored by the prospect ahead of her. The lawyer was an elderly gentleman of the old school, who took the responsibility which her father had placed upon him with the utmost seriousness. His former relations with the family, while Lucy was a child, were those of friend, but from the moment when he entered upon his duties as trustee these relations were completely changed. He now stood in the capacity of a paid retainer, and took every precaution necessary to prevent the appearance of combining business and friendship. He guarded Lucy's interests with a protective care which could not have been exceeded were the property his own; secretly he passed hours of anxiety over the extravagances he could but see: yet with studied care he kept his relations with his client well within strictly business limits.

Lucy was sitting on the piazza, deep in a story of modern society life which was deliciously risqué, and she would far rather continue the thrilling tale than be called back to realities by a discussion of anything so hopelessly prosaic as Vallie and money. But Mr. Amsden was a friend albeit an old foggy, and the least she could do was to be civil in exchange for the trouble he had taken. As long as she could, she kept him talking about anything and everything rather than the subject which she knew was upon his mind. Mr. Amsden was interested in musical matters, so she asked him innumerable questions regarding the guarantee fund being raised for the Opera, and the prospects for the coming season. The change in the Symphony conductors offered another fruitful subject, and although she knew that his preferences exactly coincided with her own in the discussion

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then prevalent of the relative merits of the two conductors, she deliberately took the opposite side in order to prolong the conversation. But she found herself completely submerged when Mr. Amsden's enthusiasm carried him into a lengthy presentation of what he believed to be mistaken zeal on the part of the smaller men in the modern school of composers, in giving up the expression of their own individuality in their struggle against the obvious. She brought down upon herself the wall of the house, when she had sought only to interpose a screen; and in self-defense she reminded her caller of his probable errand, which was the last thing in the world she had intended to do.

"I suppose you have some more of those horrid papers for me to sign," she said at length, seeing that Mr. Amsden was about to advance his carefully thought out criticism of modern literature. "Why do I have to do it anyway? I know only what you tell me about things, and you can do it much better yourself."

"It was not in regard to transfers that I wrote you, Mrs. Spencer," Mr. Amsden said, pausing a moment before his reply in order to grasp firmly the thread of the new line of discourse. "It is the fact that your husband's drafts are now so heavily in excess of his income, that I venture to bring the matter to your attention."

"But we have talked that over several times," Lucy protested. "I have no desire to quarrel with Vallie over a few pennies."

"But it amounts to very much more than a few pennies, Mrs. Spencer."

"I know, but just see how the cost of living has gone up since papa arranged what he should spend."

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"Then your instructions are to honor your husband's drafts, no matter how much they exceed the limit your father placed upon him?"

"I am sure papa would increase his allowance if he were alive," Lucy insisted. "He would understand even better than I do that everything costs more now. I don't want Vallie to think that I begrudge him what he spends."

"All I wish is to learn your exact desires in the matter," Mr. Amsden replied. "I have no right even to suggest what is contrary to your own best judgment, but I feel it my duty to acquaint you with the facts."

"Duty!" cried Lucy impulsively. "How I am getting to hate that word! Every one is telling me something about 'duty,' and I'm beginning to think it the most hideous word in the language!"

Mr. Amsden was surprised at Lucy's outbreak, but it did not deter him from delivering his message. "I must tell you, none-the-less, that if you insist upon disregarding the sums your husband draws it will be necessary for you to curtail your own expenses."

Lucy sat upright, now fully aroused from her indifference. "What do you mean?" she demanded. "Has anything happened to my property?"

"Nothing," the lawyer replied calmly. "It is yielding more today than it ever has; but there is a limit even to the estate which your father left you."

"But there never has been before," she protested. "Why should there be now?"

"Because Mr. Spencer is drawing very much more heavily upon it than ever before."

Lucy waited for him to continue, but he apparently had no intention of saying more. "How much is Vallie exceeding his allowance?" she asked reluctantly.

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"During the past three months he has drawn more than twice as much as your father stipulated should be paid him for the entire year."

This second bit of information staggered Lucy even more than the first. She seldom tried to think in figures, but without much thought she was fully aware that this represented a vast sum of money.

"What has he done with it?" she asked at length.

Mr. Amsden shrugged his shoulders. "It would be an impertinence for me even to surmise," he replied.

"Of course something must be done about it," she admitted.

"I see no alternative. I am sure he will appreciate the situation when you bring it to his attention."

"Oh, no!" Lucy cried; "you must do that."

"I am perfectly willing to see him or to write him; but of course I can act only as your agent."

"But that would be better than for me to say anything to him. Vallie has a brute of a temper, and he has been in a horrible humor lately."

"If it would be more agreeable to you, I shall be very glad to see him," Mr. Amsden said, rising.

"It would be very much more agreeable," she assented. "But do it in such a way that he won't know we've talked it over."

The lawyer smiled for the first time. "I'm afraid I can't do that," he said. "Mr. Spencer knows that I have no power to restrict."

"Then there's sure to be a scene."

"I don't believe Mr. Spencer will be unreasonable," Mr. Amsden replied reassuringly. "He must appreciate that you have been and are more than generous."

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"You don't know him," Lucy said disconsolately. "I wonder how he has spent all that money."

Mr. Amsden either could not or was unwilling to satisfy her curiosity. He repeated his willingness to acquaint her husband with the decision she had arrived at, expressed his high personal esteem, and took his departure.

Lucy was thrown into a fit of blues after the lawyer's visit from which she found it difficult to extricate herself. Money had meant nothing to her, for she had not been obliged to regard it as other than a medium of exchange. During her father's life she was gratified in every desire of her heart, great or small, and his careful provision for her comfort after his death had enabled her to continue along the same easy path. The fact that Vallie had in a measure been dependent upon her since their marriage had signified little. There was enough for both, and it seemed perfectly natural that they both should draw upon the same common fund. She could not imagine him earning his own living, so, if she had thought of it at all, her comparison would have been as between the small income he received from his comparatively meager property and her own substantial one. But the astounding amount he had drawn during the past three months for the first time caused her to focus her mind upon a subject which had never before come up between them.

It was true that the controlling interest lay in Lucy's curiosity regarding the occasion which had demanded such expenditures. She knew that Vallie gambled freely, and that he usually lost, but this would not explain the size of the drafts. He must have been speculating, which she remembered her father to have called the most vicious form of gambling. This explanation in a measure satisfied her, and her mind next turned to the probable effect

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Mr. Amsden's interview with Vallie would have upon her. He would be very angry, she was sure. But the lawyer had spoken of the generosity she had always shown him, and he was right. As she thought it over, she had been generous, though this fact had never before impressed itself upon her. And what had Vallie ever done to show his appreciation? Nothing, — absolutely nothing. He accepted it all as a commonplace fact, and then neglected her. He wouldn't care if his overdrafts forced her to curtail her own expenses; he would probably expect her to do so. Then she remembered her conversation with Auchester: he thought her a fool to endure Vallie's neglect, she could see that. What would he say if he knew that all she meant to her husband now was a source of supply? Her life with him was a mockery, just as the Captain said. Cunningham would have her endure it all for the sake of the children, — her salvation! She wondered just how each of these two men would answer her question if she put it to him squarely. Why should she wonder? She knew! Auchester was a man through and through, with red blood coursing in his veins, with a true appreciation of what life meant, and the right each one had to live his own and in his own way. But that was exactly what Vallie was doing, only there was a difference in that he was living his life on her money. Cunningham had different ideals. He saw everything from a legal standpoint. She had rights, but they could not be exercised separately from Vallie's or the children's. And he believed in "duty"! Oh, what an ugly word! She had lived with it, slept with it, dreamed of it, and almost perished of ennui in the experience. Two men, both in the world and of it, yet taking so different a viewpoint of all which surrounded them! She had accepted

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Cunningham as guide and mentor. Why should she choose him rather than Auchester? The Captain was certainly the more agreeable companion. He never scolded her for acts of folly; he admired her freedom from conventionality, and told her not to be persuaded to act like other women just because other women acted as they did. Cunningham treated her as a child, and so did Margaret.

Back and forth like a shuttlecock she tossed the conflicting thoughts, one moment full of gratitude to Cunningham for his friendship, the next, rebelling against his watchfulness over her. One moment happy in the memory of some word of praise from Auchester, the next, frightened by the social heresy expressed in his views. But all the time her heart debated, with the fiercest arguments pro and con, which man's view of life was right, — which one's?

XVI

AUCHESTER, experienced soldier that he was, had carefully worked out his plan for an attack upon the citadel of a woman's heart. He was convinced that at present it was unoccupied, and that its only protective ramparts were the original fortifications built of imperfect materials. Lucy was inured to the habit of being married, and convention had brought her to the point of believing that the citadel could never again be stormed. Her innocence in this respect, so at variance with her disregard of other conventions, struck the Captain as a curious paradox; but with him affairs had reached a point where everything she did, and the original way in which she did it, made her that much more appealing.

The method of his attack was subtle and to that extent expressive of himself. One less experienced than the Captain would have sent her flowers and candy, but this would have been commonplace. Auchester was far above the commonplace, so instead of these obvious evidences of admiration he sent her sometimes a bit of rare china or lace, sometimes fruit which must have come from the uttermost parts of the earth, sometimes merely a verse of poetry; but each token was of such a nature that it could not fail to arouse her curiosity, thus requiring an explanation and serving to keep the donor very much before her mind's eye. The attack was only a sortie at

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first, but as the citadel gave no evidences of self-defense he became more bold, and Lucy came to look forward to the arrival of each mysterious package as an oasis in the monotony of her daily routine.

There was no disguising the fact that the daily routine was monotonous, and that this summer, as far as Lucy's enjoyment was concerned, had been a dismal failure. In other years each week had been filled with excitement of one sort or another, and the days fled past with incredible speed. Now it was an event even to have the monotony broken at all. She was lonely and unhappy, and during the many hours in which she found too much opportunity to think she tried to explain to herself just what the difference was, and how it had come about. Of course the main cause was the change in herself, under the direct influence of Margaret and Cunningham. She had accepted their viewpoint more by way of atonement than because she believed it to be right. She knew that she had done wrong in giving way to her impulse with Ned, but she wondered if her atonement was not by this time complete. She had never made girl friends, even as a child. As she became older, other women were frightened off by her frank disregard of conventional sobriety, and her preference for men kept them on the footing of acquaintances only. There had always been an army of men flocking in Lucy's wake, but now they had fallen off, one by one, until she was left almost to herself; and as a result of her previous indifference she had no one else to rely upon. She could not understand why they had deserted her. Earlier in the summer they had appeared as usual, dropping in for tea or to pick her up for a motor ride, or inviting her to some event at one or another of the clubs; but for the past month Cunningham and

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Auchester were the only men who had shown the slightest interest in her existence. It must be that the new kind of life she was trying to lead had made her less attractive, and she knew that another month of similar experience would make her so spiritless as to put her out of the running forever. Lucy saw visions rising before her of becoming an old woman at twenty-eight! And what really was being gained?

In the exact fulfillment of her promise to Cunningham she passed a part of each day with the children, but she had not yet succeeded in making it other than a perfunctory performance. She tried to play with them, but it was utterly unreasonable that they should expect her actually to sit on the sand and ruin her new morning gown. She was quite ready to help them build forts if they would find some shady place, but she couldn't be of much assistance with only one hand, and if she laid down her sunshade her face would become horribly freckled. The one success she felt she had attained was in reading them stories. This came just before bed-time when they were tired enough to keep still, and she did feel a certain degree of pleasure, and a new sensation, in having Babs cuddle contentedly in her lap, while Larry, sitting cross-legged on the floor, listened with wide-open eyes to the wonderful experiences of Aladdin or Perseus or Ulysses. Why could they not always be quiet like this? Yet, had she thought, they could hardly have been her children if they had responded to the wish! Lucy really believed that if they could be subdued she might find in them some real companionship just as Ned suggested; but she was still convinced that this time could never come until they were grown up into rational beings.

Vallie became more and more altered as the summer

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progressed. Whether it was because Lucy had fewer of her own interests to think about, or whether the change was as complete as it now appeared to her, she could not determine; but she found it difficult to explain to herself how she had endured him these years without arriving at her present conclusions earlier. At all events, until this summer he had not disclosed how disagreeable he could be. She was perfectly familiar with his negative qualities, but she had not realized how hopelessly uninteresting he was. His business was nothing but a pretext for getting away from the house, and his time divided itself between various forms of personal enjoyment in no one of which he excelled. Whatever best there was in him must be given to his friends, for Lucy was certain that they would not endure the surly, uncomfortable disposition which he exhibited at home. Cunningham was a man of action and a man of character, making each day count for something, and making Margaret's life worth living. He too had changed since Lucy's foolish escapade with him, and she missed the previous relations; still she could but respect him for it after all. With the resentment which she experienced at times toward the restraint which he had actually imposed upon her, and what she felt to be the unfair outcome of it all, she admired him more than any man she had ever met; and even when she blamed him most she was unconsciously proud that she meant enough to him to warrant the friendship which he extended.

In comparing Vallie with Cunningham Lucy inevitably included Auchester. He too was a man of action, and while of a type quite different from Ned, yet he also extracted from each day's experience something to count in the grand total of what he was. To his magnetic pres-

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ence and undoubted attainments was also added a certain degree of mystery, which deepened as their acquaintance ripened. He had spoken of coming into his property on the death of his brother, and at the same time of assuming the position of head of his ancestral house. Several times Lucy had been on the point of questioning him, but with unusual restraint for her, or because there was something about the Captain which indicated that what he wished to have known was spoken without request, she had always refrained. There was no mystery about Vallie: any one could read his entire character in the brief space of time necessary for an introduction. There was little of the mysterious about Cunningham: her interest in him was because of his strength mellowed by a tenderness which was almost womanly; her interest in Auchester was the expression of a gratified pride heightened by curiosity.

Mr. Amsden had been prompt in carrying through his interview with Spencer. Lucy was on the watch for those unmistakable evidences in her husband's disposition which would indicate that the blow had fallen, and she discovered them long before he chose to begin the conversation which she knew was bound to come. In the first place, when she came down stairs at her usual hour, she found him nervously pacing the piazza, having had his breakfast two hours earlier. Then again, he was obviously waiting for a chance to talk with her, when for weeks he had done all in his power to avoid conversation; and last, but not of least importance, Lucy sensed that he had keyed himself up to a high pitch in preparation for a great event. And of course the only "great event" which could possibly be considered as interesting them both was the question of his income.

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He paused abruptly in his sentry-like pacing when he heard her descending step upon the hallway stairs, and stood looking in at her through the broad open door. She saw it all coming and longed to run away. Conditions have much to do with the making of heroes as well as cowards, and when even the most timid find themselves face to face with that which they have dreaded, with every avenue of escape closed against them, it is seldom that they fail to rise to the emergency. So it was with Lucy: Vallie showed his nervousness plainly; she was outwardly as cool as if this had been an ordinary morning, with nothing more unpleasant ahead of her than the prospect of another day of ennui.

"Good morning, Vallie," she said cheerfully, finding that she must speak or else pass by him in silence. "You're up early, aren't you? Didn't you sleep well?"

"I want to talk with you," he replied abruptly, ignoring her questions.

"Not until I've had some breakfast," Lucy protested, seeing an opportunity to postpone the interview a few moments longer; "I didn't eat a thing up stairs, and truly I'm famished!"

"I've been waiting for you all the morning," Vallie urged. "Why can't I talk to you while you're taking your breakfast?"

"Oh, no, Vallie; you know I'm never in good humor until after I've had my coffee."

This argument had its appeal. "All right," he yielded; "but don't be long."

"I won't, dear," she replied, pleased to have gained even a brief respite; then as Vallie resumed his paces up and down, the incongruity of the epithet she had just used struck her forcefully. How easily, she thought, these

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terms of endearment become the expression of the lips and not the heart!

She could not remember ever having eaten so hearty a breakfast as she did that morning, yet the end was bound to come at last and with it the beginning of the ordeal, — for she had no notion that they could conclude matters at a single session. Bracing herself to meet it, she lighted a cigarette and strolled leisurely out upon the piazza, settling herself comfortably in her favorite chair.

“Now, Vallie,” she said, “here I am; fire away.”

Spencer came to a full stop in his walk as she appeared, and remained motionless while she adjusted herself. His hands were dug deep down into the pockets of his flannel trousers, and his white yachting cap, which he had affected since his intimacy with Eustis, was set rakishly on the back of his head. As Lucy spoke he came over to her chair and leaned against the railing of the piazza, facing her.

“What’s this game you and Amsden have cooked up to put me in leading strings?” he demanded abruptly.

“Didn’t Mr. Amsden tell you the whole story, just as he did me?”

“He told me what he chose to tell, — or what you told him.”

“I told him nothing except to explain the situation to you exactly as he had to me.”

“Then I have to account to you for every cent I spend?” Vallie asked in an ugly tone.

“Is that what Mr. Amsden suggested?”

“That’s what it amounted to. You know I can’t live on the niggardly allowance your father stipulated. Why, Eustis’ yacht costs him more than that.”

“Mr. Eustis uses his yacht as a home,” Lucy suggested,

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"and your home costs more than that; but you don't have to pay for it out of your allowance."

"I never thought things would come to this pass," he muttered, leaving her statement unchallenged.

"Until Mr. Amsden called my attention to it I supposed there was enough income to satisfy everybody," Lucy continued quietly; "but we can't spend more than we have, can we?"

"It is only necessary to readjust matters," he urged. "I have never before been so humiliated, and I won't be again. You certainly don't need all you get, and I want you to fix things so that I may receive my share without having to sit up and beg for it."

"Is what you have drawn during the past three months what you consider your share, Vallie?"

"Yes," he exclaimed boldly, seeing in Lucy's calmness a chance to carry his point.

"Do you realize that this would give you for your personal expenses four times as much as would be left for the children and me, not even taking the expenses of the house into consideration? Of course the estate isn't large enough to stand that."

Spencer, knowing her dislike for mathematics, had not expected to find Lucy so well posted as to figures, and he held this up as another grudge against "Poppy" Amsden, as he called him.

"As it is now, I get only one-tenth of the income, —"

"You mean that you are only entitled to get that amount," Lucy corrected.

"Well, put it that way if you choose. I can't live on it, and I won't. I only want my share, but I insist on having that. Suppose we divide the income. I could probably get along on that."

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Lucy's thoughts came faster than her words. Today for the first time this summer her husband had sought her companionship, and even now it was not because he felt that he owed her anything of himself, or because he wanted to be with her. It was purely a business conference, into which trade and barter were the only elements to enter. Would Cunningham have done this with Margaret? she asked herself; would Auchester have done it with her, or with any other woman? As she had thought, she stood to her husband only as a source of supply, yet before the world they jointly stood as man and wife, linked by the holiest chain which love can forge. Oh, the pity of it! her heart moaned, as she looked out from the depths of her great brown eyes and regarded this man, whom she should respect as her life's companion and as the father of her children, — first begging and then demanding as his right that which now alone remained to make her necessary to his existence!

Spencer thought his wife's silence signified that she was considering his proposition, and the fact that she entertained it at all gave him courage. This confidence left him unprepared for Lucy's question.

"Have you ever thought," she spoke as if thinking aloud, "that perhaps it would be better for both of us if we called the whole thing off?"

"Called what off?" he asked in a puzzled tone.

"This being married, when there really isn't anything to it."

"You have your marriage certificate, haven't you?" he laughed coarsely.

"I don't mean the legal side of it," Lucy explained, trying to recall the exact words which Auchester had used. "The only real marriage, you know, is that which isn't performed by man at all."

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Vallie laughed again. "What have you been doing, — reading poetry?"

"I'm really serious," Lucy insisted. "I've been thinking a good deal about it lately. I evidently bore you to the extent of driving you away from home most of the time, and I'm frank to say that you don't contribute enough to my life to give me a great amount of inspiration."

"Has this something to do with the money question we are discussing?" he demanded, suspicious for the first time.

"No," she answered. "I just wondered whether you felt as I did."

"Do you mean that you want to be free so that you can marry some one else?"

"I can't imagine such a thing. You can take a chance on anything once, you know, but it's your own fault if you make the second mistake."

"Well," he said, calming down, "if you have serious thoughts of suggesting a separation, you had better talk some more with 'Poppy' Amsden. He may tell you a thing or two. First of all, you have to have some grounds for a thing of that sort, and being bored won't go. Now about this other matter, do you agree to an equal division of the income?"

"I don't believe I do, Vallie. Suppose I instructed Mr. Amsden to let you draw twice the amount papa arranged for you."

"But I've had more than that these last five years," he protested warmly.

"Does it run back as far as that?" she asked mildly. "Then, as Mr. Amsden says, I think I have been foolishly generous."

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"It isn't a question of generosity," Spencer replied hotly; "it's my right. I'm your husband, and I insist upon being treated as such."

Lucy sat up in her chair and looked him full in the face. She felt a new strength given to her, though she knew not whence it came. She had not intended to quarrel with him. She had been quite ready to concede much rather than become embroiled, but the thoughts which had come to her during their interview, and the unexpected turn it had taken, led to the least expected thing of all. Vallie's last words touched a spring which released an avalanche of feeling, and her words came fast and self-marshalled as she replied:

"You my husband, Vallie?" she exclaimed. "What have you ever given me in token of it? We have lived together under the same roof, but that doesn't make you my husband. Our lives have been separate, and you have given me of yourself only when no more attractive alternative offered. You have left me alone all summer, and today the only reason you have sought me out is to get from me more money — money — money. After having lived all these years on my generosity, you would take it all if you could get it. You my husband — and demanding rights! I am the one who should demand. I agree to nothing. The only hold I have on you at all is this hateful money, and I'm not such a fool as to give it up. If what papa arranged for you to have is not enough for you to live upon, then get out and earn some more as other men are doing, or stay at home which is still less expensive. I am tired to death of the whole thing. I won't talk about it any more, so that's the end of it."

Spencer was completely staggered by Lucy's harangue. It was the last thing he had expected, and he had sense

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enough to see that he had over-reached himself. If she stood by her ultimatum his position was serious, for in addition to the amounts he had drawn there was still another considerable sum accumulated in unpaid bills, which he could not possibly satisfy with only his regular allowance to depend upon. But he knew Lucy, and this was simply another of her momentary whims. He would make himself agreeable to her for a while and she would then become reasonable. But it was not wise for him to retreat too openly, or his motive would be suspected.

Lucy was prepared for an angry outburst, but instead he assumed a dignity of which she had not supposed him capable. "You do me a great injustice," was all he said, as he turned from her and entered the house.

XVII

THERE were reasons beyond that which Lucy gave in answer to her own inquiring mind to explain the difference between this summer and others which had preceded it. First of all, she overlooked the fact that the merry gatherings at the Spencer "cottage" had not merely happened, but were the result of her own planning and invitation. Vallie had made his home his headquarters for entertaining, and while the groups of friends frequently assembled as the result of separate invitations, and each group found its enjoyment in its own peculiar way, yet there was a mingling which tended to keep the action at fever heat most of the time. Perhaps the fact that Lucy forswore these gay experiences this summer may have had something to do with Vallie's change of base to Eustis' yacht; but whatever the occasion, life at the "cottage" had certainly assumed a deep drab hue.

It was quite true, as Lucy said, that the men who had flocked about her at other times missed the daring *camaraderie* which they had come to associate with her personality. The change which had come over her proved a large topic of conversation among the men, and various reasons were assigned. The fact that Vallie was so much away from home suggested certain unpleasant possibilities; the persistent rumor, starting none knew where, that

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Cunningham was the occasion of the obvious coolness between husband and wife, made them wonder what fire was smouldering to warrant so much smoke. Even Archie Reed, usually the last in any group to discover the real point, recalled the fact that Lucy had made a pretext not to see him when he called, and he now became convinced that it was because she feared to give Vallie further cause for jealousy. Yet through it all Lucy was not without her defenders, but the consensus of opinion among the men was that it might be just as well to go slowly as a safeguard against later complications. The memory had not left them of the hasty trip abroad which Miller took two years before, just because he happened to be with another attractive little woman at the particular moment when her husband's jealousy at last burst forth. Of course the real man in the case was finally brought to light, but it was a bit unpleasant for poor Miller to receive the first force of the storm when the lady in question had used him simply as a buffer to protect the object of her affections. To a certain extent Miller had lost caste with his fellow-bachelors for his lack of judgment, and no one else cared to run the risk of a similar fall from a similar cause. A married man may perhaps be forgiven for over-confidence in his friendship for other men's wives, but the bachelor's most important asset is his ability to discriminate.

The effect of this discrimination was that the men made no advances in Lucy's direction, and she did not specifically invite them. Her neighbors, who had never been too neighborly, joked about Mrs. Channing's reception at the Spencers', but the vivid account given by that estimable lady to her friends of the cigarettes, cocktails, décolleté gowns, and lingerie which played so important

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a part on that memorable occasion, did not result in adding to Lucy's visiting list. The men, it is true, on hearing the same story, pronounced it "a rare one," and would have canonized Lucy on the spot. That was because they had seen Lucy and probably preferred the way she wore her hair to the antique mode affected by Mrs. Channing; but while the men on the North Shore may canonize, they may not make up the visiting lists.

So, with slight variations, too unimportant to change conditions, Lucy's only visitors were Margaret, Cunningham, and Auchester. Margaret stuck bravely to her task, and did her best to bring Lucy and the children together, but as time went on without accomplishing the desired result she wondered at the lack of motherly instinct which was really the only obstructing element. The children sensed this lack though they could not have explained it, and Lucy, comprehending just as little, lost heart and courage in the face of constant rebuffs. At first Margaret thought it due to selfishness, but when she discovered how miserable Lucy was, and how desperately she tried to advance her misconceived and misdirected plans, it became only too evident that the mistakes were due to a lack of knowing how.

Who can tell a mother how to love her child? If the first spark of life — that electric message from the Almighty Father that he has granted woman a share in His immortal work — fails to enkindle in the mother heart the flame which illumines all the world, more could scarcely be expected from human agency. Margaret lost patience often, but as often was filled with pity for the struggling, suffering spirit, beating its bruised wings against imaginary bars, its heart aching for something to relieve its pain, when all the time salvation lay near at hand, obscured only

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by the scales which covered the searching eyes! Margaret fully shared her husband's belief that the children were Lucy's only avenue of escape, and it seemed to her so obvious that she did not sense the necessity of supplying Lucy with some alternative to serve as anchorage until the missing buoy be found.

When Cunningham was prevented from going to her, either with Margaret or alone, Lucy, unable to endure her loneliness, did not hesitate to go to him. In fact there was little which happened which she did not confide. He was uncomfortable about her frequent calls at his office, yet he realized that this was an outlet for her pent-up thoughts, and it was safer for her to express these to him than to any one else. Thus he came to know of the situation with Vallie, and the stand which she took regarding his drafts upon her estate encouraged him to believe that the womanhood which he was sure existed was really there, and would eventually come to the surface. What Margaret told him of her own experiences was discouraging, what he himself saw would have made another man wonder if his advice had not been wrong; but with Cunningham a situation which was logically correct could not contain an error. So he comforted and encouraged her as best he could; told her that her suggestion of separation was all right to frighten Vallie into good behavior, but was not to be seriously considered for a moment; urged her to gather around herself certain of the friends whom she had enjoyed, and to lead with them a rational existence; and, particularly, to train herself to a better understanding of her children.

If Cunningham noticed the curious omission of all reference to Auchester in the confidence Lucy gave him, he did not mention it. He may have thought it unwise to

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suggest a name which in his heart he hoped had been forgotten. Lucy was conscious of the fact, and she thought a good deal about it. There was no reason why she should avoid mentioning the Captain, yet she did avoid it. Perhaps she feared Cunningham would insist upon her giving up what had really become her only relief. She had sacrificed already more than Ned had any right to ask, yet she knew in her heart that if he insisted upon it she would also give up Auchester. It was all too paradoxical for her to comprehend. Both men were friends, one of whom held her back from living her own life, the other encouraged her to be herself and contributed to such happiness as now remained to her. Cunningham contributed nothing but advice, and hateful advice at that. She was under no obligation to either. Yet — and this was the curious part of it — she could not get Cunningham out of her mind whenever Auchester was with her. Try as she would to throw herself wholly into the enjoyment of the Captain's companionship, there sat the ghost, Banquo-like, urging her not to be herself.

Auchester was conscious of the restraint but he was by no means discouraged. The change in Lucy's attitude had come over her during their brief acquaintanceship, and it had answered a question that at first had puzzled him: she was a woman of character, and the unconventionality which he had admired and yet questioned was not the result of loose ideas of right and wrong, but rather a confidence in her strength to be her own judge between the two elements. This other influence, which he now knew was Cunningham, was striving, from motives which the Captain could not comprehend, to force Lucy back into the ranks of those not strong enough to think for themselves, for in Auchester's mind it was an admission

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of weakness to allow the world to make so vital a decision. The influence was powerful, yet it caused him no anxiety after he discovered what kind of man Cunningham was. Sometime he would also discover what prompted this apparently disinterested friend; but in the meanwhile Auchester contented himself with the opportunities Lucy afforded him to supply the antidote. Whenever he was with her he skilfully led the conversation into channels which bore upon the subject he had most at heart, and he knew that the very influence exercised by Cunningham made Lucy the more susceptible to his views.

Auchester was not a psychologist, but he found exquisite pleasure in studying the personality of the woman who had come so unexpectedly yet so strongly into his life. He experienced, with her, the pain sensations and the pleasure sensations as they became fused, and gradually shaped themselves into a well-defined personality. It gave him joy to realize that in this way she was already a part of him and he of her, and that he knew her better than anyone else,—even better than she herself. He made himself a part of each passing mood, crystallized into words half-thoughts which she could not have expressed, anticipated her intuitions, and explained her dreamy vagaries. The psychologist would have felt it necessary to analyze these expressions of will and emotion, and to decompose them into their separate elements; Auchester was content to feel them without analysis, to accept them with no other explanation than that they formed a part of the personality which he loved with an intensity characteristic of himself.

Lucy talked as freely with him about Vallie as she did with Cunningham, except that she made no reference to the money complication. She would have thought this

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an evidence of bad taste; but the intimate way in which Auchester had been a part of one side of Vallie's degradation made her feel that it was perfectly natural for her to express her exact feelings toward her husband. It would be absurd to attempt any concealment after what he had seen that night. She even thought that she talked impersonally about it, and the Captain never took advantage of what she said. He kept insisting upon the inalienable right which every person had to live his own life, it is true; he repeated his own convictions that marriage automatically ceased to exist as an institution the moment love failed to control; he insisted that she owed it to herself to rectify any early mistake she might have made in this respect when the right time came: but he made no personal application, so must have been discussing it as an abstruse question. He never made love to her or suggested that their relations were other than those which should exist between the best of friends, — and in her heart she thanked God for this friendship.

Yet against his arguments and ideas were those of Cunningham's, which she could not disassociate. The moments of exhilaration after visits with Auchester were followed by depression which more than offset the relief she believed that she had found. She lost patience with herself. She was weak and unsubstantial. She allowed herself to be influenced beyond reason, and had reached a point where her own personality had become negative. Vallie was the only one she could stand up against now. With Cunningham or with Auchester she simply reflected what they were. She must make a stand against herself. She would take the best which Cunningham had given her and the best which she had assimilated from Auchester, and merging this with what she knew to be the best in

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herself she would leave the vacillating nonentity Lucy Spencer behind her. She would live her own life in her own way in spite of all: that much of what the Captain said at all events was wise; she would show Cunningham and Vallie and the world that she was a real person after all. The experiences she had passed through would help her: she had learned to control her impulses, but she would not kill them. They had never injured any one, she repeated over and over again, — why should Ned be so severe upon her?

XVIII

VALLIE found her in this unusual state when he unexpectedly returned to the house on this particular evening. He was not certain whether it presaged well or ill to his own affairs, but the time was near at hand when matters must again be discussed. And as he had heard her say that one can always take a chance once, he decided to take that chance.

He came down to dinner dressed in the pink of perfection. He had been to the city for the first time in a week, and because of this Lucy was prepared for an unusually disagreeable time when she saw him appear. In fact she had hoped that he would dine anywhere except at home, for she was in a mood so different from that which had obsessed her during the past few weeks that she resented any possibility of being forced back into the depths. Valentine was obviously uncomfortable and dusty when he returned, but at dinner time he blossomed forth like the rose. From his immaculate white dinner jacket and soft tucked shirt to the tip of his shiny pump he was a picture of luxurious undress. Lucy regarded him in surprise and admiration: surprise, for it had been months since he had so honored her; admiration for the smartness of the man's appearance. As she once said, "Vallie is such a good looking boy if you only see his clothes." He

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was conscious of the impression he made and enjoyed it, but to prevent any suspicion of this from entering Lucy's head he pulled a lavender silk handkerchief from his coat sleeve and nonchalantly flecked at an imaginary speck upon his foot. She watched him as he drew a chair beside hers and seated himself. Then, at length, their eyes met and both smiled.

"Who's coming?" Lucy asked.

"No one," he replied, with a fairly successful attempt to look surprised at the question, — "why?"

"You're staying home, and you're doing the double-edge for the family."

"Oh!" Spencer articulated, rising and standing in front of her. "Do you like it?"

"Stunning," she replied; "did you just get it?"

"Yes; the tailor was disagreeable about my overdue account, and I could only pacify him by ordering another suit."

"Anything that looks as well as that is an absolute necessity. And you're really going to stay home and have dinner just with me?" Lucy was still incredulous.

"Why not?" he asked magnanimously; "might go further and fare worse."

Her mood of the moment was such that it did not demand explanations. She felt that today she had broken the bonds of servitude, and it seemed natural that all around her, without knowing the mental process which had produced her metamorphosis, should feel the change in temperature. In the past it had not been necessary for her to cry out for companionship; that sad condition had come only since she had tried to live her life some one else's way. Now she was herself again, and the first result was that her husband was at her feet.

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She smiled contentedly. "This shows how foolish premonitions are," she said. "Every time, lately, when I have begun to feel happy, something has occurred to give me a worse fit of the blues than the last. I was sure it was going to happen again tonight."

"I've been in the dumps myself all summer." Vallie consoled her by sharing the common cause. "It hasn't been exactly a screamer, has it?"

"Beastly!" she said emphatically. "You've been gay enough, but mine has been a lingering death. I don't see why you should have been down."

"Debts," he answered briefly.

"But Vallie —"

"Dinner is served," the maid announced.

They rose mechanically and moved toward the dining-room. Affairs were happening well for Spencer, and he blessed the maid for timing her appearance so opportunely.

"Let me mix you a new cocktail," he volunteered; "it's a great one for a warm night."

Lucy had told Mrs. Channing that her husband could mix cocktails in three different languages, but this was a fourth, or more properly speaking a dialect. She watched him deftly turn the demijohn of Jamaica rum into the crotch of his arm, and pour from it into the silver shaker. Then he dropped in a lime, "just to cut it" as he explained, and completed the mixture from the bottle of Italian vermouth.

"There!" he exclaimed, quite in his element as he paused after a vigorous shaking; "that is straight from the tropics. One of the boys was cruising down there and he brought me this demijohn and the receipt."

"What do you call it?" Lucy asked, tasting it with a degree of suspicion. "My! but it is good!"

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"Swizzle," Vallie replied; "down there they mix it up with a stick they call swizzle."

"It's better than its name," she laughed; "but one goes a long ways, doesn't it?"

The dinner was a joy to Lucy. She could not remember when he had been such good company, or when she had before so enjoyed being alone with him. It brought back earlier days when each had been more dependent upon the other, before their paths had verged so far apart. They talked about it, and as they touched upon the subject memory released the flood-gates of the past, allowing the events, great and small, to marshal themselves before them in happy array. Curiously enough they were all pleasant happenings, such being the natural optimism of the heart, which even after wretched abuse breaks from its leash in quick response to the faintest call to happiness. They talked of the children, a topic rarely referred to between them except by way of criticism, but it was Lucy who suggested the subject. Jealous of each moment and fearful lest the spell be broken, she had the coffee and cigarettes served at the table, and the conversation continued, the calm contentment being punctuated by merry laughter which made her feel and seem like the young, carefree girl Vallie had first met ten years before.

But all dreams must end, and Lucy sighed as they finally rose from the table. She slipped her arm through his as they passed out upon the broad piazza, strolling leisurely up and down, watching the brilliant stellar display above and listening to the peaceful lapping of the water on the shore below them. Cunningham and his quiet, forceful domination over her was forgotten; Auchester with his fascinating personality was far away from Lucy's thoughts:

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now she had no need of Ned's watchful, friendly care, and the Captain's philosophy appealed to her only in times of stress. Up and down the piazza she walked in silence with her husband, he watching for an opportunity to make his final appeal, she quite satisfied to have this quiet communion continue forever.

"I'm glad you like this suit," Vallie said at length, feeling that the time had come for him to speak, and being able to think of no less commonplace remark with which to accomplish his purpose.

"I do like it," Lucy replied, pausing in her steps and drawing back to look at it again. "You are very smart in it. White is wonderful for summer."

"Yes," he admitted, as they resumed their walk and Lucy again lapsed into silence. This subject was evidently not sufficiently prolific to start a general conversation, so Spencer tried again.

"You were asking me why I had been so blue this summer —"

Lucy laughed. "First it's white and then it's blue, — let's talk of something red, and be patriotic!"

"But I'm serious," he protested. "I've been awfully upset all summer. Everybody rooks me."

"You've stuck to it pretty close for a game you didn't like."

"Oh, I don't mean the crowd I've been with," Vallie explained. "They're all right; but it's the other people, — the ones I owe money to."

Lucy saw that he was determined to revive the topic which the call to dinner had interrupted, and which she hoped he would forget. It was really too bad to have so great a drop from the heights to which this touch of joy had carried her.

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"Let's not talk about money tonight, Vallie," she urged; "I'm too happy."

"But I must," he insisted; "that's what I stayed home for."

She stopped short as the words cut into her heart. This was the explanation of his suave good nature and his indulgent companionship! What she had believed was a breath of life was filled with pestilence, loaded down with the malignant bacilli which destroy the soul. She looked at him again, but it was not the smart white suit which she saw now: it was the final disintegration of those elements which went to make up the man. In that brief moment, intensified by the hopefulness of the hour just passed, she realized how full life is of mockery. He had been biding his time, counting upon her weakness and her generosity, acting a part which she in her simplicity might never have recognized except for the unexpected frankness which truth had forced to his lips! She felt as if the air had suddenly become chilled, and a weakness seized her body.

"Let us sit down," she said, again resting her hand upon his arm.

All unconscious of the effect his words had produced, Vallie led her to a chair and drew his own close beside it. "You see," he began confidently, "I'm in a devil of a fix. You've always been a good sport, and I know you'll help me out."

"Yes," she answered weakly; "I see."

"There are a whole lot of debts. I can't possibly meet them, and the people are getting nasty about it."

"Mr. Amsden says you've drawn far greater amounts lately than ever before. How can you be so much in debt?"

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"You're not going to question me, are you?" he demanded.

"I'm only trying to understand."

"But you don't have to understand," Vallie explained. "I really don't understand myself. Isn't it plain enough if I tell you that it's so?"

"Perhaps it ought to be," Lucy answered; "but it seems to me that at least one of us should understand."

"That's because you're a woman," he said cheerfully. "I don't want to bore you with the details of this thing that has been making me down sick. There is no use in that."

"Just what do you want, Vallie?"

"I want to draw ten thousand dollars tomorrow and square things up, and then say two thousand a month."

"Ten thousand in debt after all you've had lately!" Lucy exclaimed. "Where has it gone?"

"Now you're questioning me again," he said stiffly.

Lucy's eyes looked far away out into the dark expanse of water, lighted only by the flickering of the stars. She had been happy for a little moment, and the return to realities was just that much the more cruel.

"Will you do it?" Spencer demanded at length.

"What are you going to give me in exchange?"

He did not comprehend. "What do you mean? Is there something you want to trade?"

"In exchange for what you ask is there anything which occurs to you as my right?" she continued, trying to be clear.

"Your right?" he repeated after her. "What in the world do you want that you haven't got?"

Lucy looked at him sadly. "Can you think of nothing?"

"Nothing," he answered firmly.

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"Do you owe me nothing of yourself?"

"So that's what you mean! You'd like to have me stick around the house. That would be a note! Tied to your wife's apron strings!"

"Do you owe me nothing of yourself," she repeated, "even when you are away from home?"

Vallie looked at her quickly, but was satisfied that she had only accidentally touched so near the mark. "I'm not good at guessing puzzles. Why don't you talk so that I can understand? Aren't you satisfied? You always have been before."

"Yes, but we're growing older, Vallie; and the children are getting to the point where they will notice how little their parents mean to each other. I'm only trying to find out just where we stand. Tell me, am I anything more to you than a bank account?"

"A bank account isn't of much value when it's over-drawn," he said feelingly.

"Then if I fail in my capacity of banker, your last interest in me is destroyed. Is that it?"

"That's a nasty way to put it."

"But it's true, isn't it?"

"I don't say it is; but I simply must have the money. Will you fix Amsden so that I can get it?"

"No, Vallie, I will not," Lucy replied firmly.

He rose impatiently with a muttered imprecation and stalked off into the shadow of the piazza, returning in a belligerent mood. He stood before her chair staring at her sternly. Then he said: "Do you mean that?"

"Absolutely. If you've been such a fool as to get into trouble after having had all that money, you may get out of it as best you can."

Vallie was angry through and through, but his position

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was so precarious that he dared not indulge in the luxury of giving way. Surely he could make her yield. He would shame her into it: "You've never been a tightwad before, Lucy," he pleaded. "I didn't know you had a pocket nerve, and I won't believe it now."

"You'll have to believe it, — call it what you will. An hour ago you could have had anything you wished. I believed there was something left in you after all. Perhaps it was because I wanted to find it that I was so easily deceived. Now I've reached my limit. Keep on going your way and I'll go mine, — and it will be mine, too."

Lucy rose, even more consumed with anger than Vallie because of her power to feel more deeply. She started for the door, intuitively realizing that if she could reach her own room and indulge herself in a flood of tears it would be a real relief. Vallie understood her action.

"If you stick to that, Lucy, you will drive me to do something desperate," he said, still holding himself in.

"You haven't courage enough nor manhood enough to do anything but threaten," she retorted, turning with her hand upon the screen door. "I wish I thought you had."

"Haven't courage enough!" he demanded sullenly, taking a quick step forward and grasping her wrist. "You had better be careful, — you don't know how desperate I am."

Lucy felt her nature change in an instant as his grip tightened, and she drew herself to her full height with an expression of disgust which she now made no effort to conceal.

"Trying to break into the bank?" she asked coldly.

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“Do you think this will persuade me to change my mind? You — my husband! God pity me!”

With a fling of her arm she released herself, and the door slammed as she turned into the house. Then a swish of skirts and the slam of the door upstairs announced that the refugee had found her haven of rest.

XIX

IT did not occur to Spencer, as he stood there angry in his indecision, that he was other than a deeply injured man. There is perhaps no more confusing element which can befog the view of one's own conduct than a belief that existing conditions justify an attitude. In the present instance Lucy was herself partly to blame, for it had only been recently that she had appeared to take notice, much less to take exception to his manner of living; yet had he completed his analysis Spencer would have been forced to admit that this very manner of living was not now the same as that which she had previously accepted. The point was that he did not believe she realized that any change had taken place. Accepting this assumption as fact, he considered her action as selfish beyond belief, and her contempt as unwarranted by anything which he had said or done. She had the money and he needed it. "An hour ago you could have had anything you wished," she had told him, and this was conclusive evidence that her later denial was simply the expression of one of her many whims, to which he had been subjected during the whole of his married life. If she chose she could easily relieve the pressure upon him, but now she did not choose. What she said about her "rights" amused him; but that of course was only another of her many vagaries.

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When a woman does exactly what she pleases she certainly cannot complain that her "rights" have been invaded!

So the idea and the excuse in Spencer's mind grew to unusual proportions, giving him a driving force of action. Just whither this would take him was not clear as yet, but the real goad of his financial necessity lost itself in the idea that he was fighting as a martyr for a principle. Long after Lucy's flight up stairs he tried to crystallize the idea, but he was demanding of himself too much: it was a sufficient mental strain to conceive it. But the crystallization would come, he felt confident. The driving force was too strong within him not to bear fruit so soon as circumstances combined to produce the opportunity.

He prepared for his departure in better spirits than might have been expected, leaving word that he did not know when he would return. He hardly expected this to cause any particular consternation, as he had been so much away from home this summer, but at least it would indicate his displeasure. He knew that at Marblehead he could find diversion, and it was necessary now to wait in order to give things a chance to happen. Surely it was the act of judgment to pass the waiting time as agreeably as possible.

As he heard the automobile drive up to the portecochère he walked to the steps to meet it, and was surprised to find Margaret Cunningham in the tonneau. She too was surprised, for it was the first time she had seen him for months, and she had expected again to find Lucy by herself.

"Were you looking for some one else?" Margaret asked, noting his expression as he greeted her.

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"No," he hastened to explain; "I thought it was my car. I was just going over to the club."

"Don't you want Eric to drive you over? Lucy is at home, I suppose?"

"No and yes," he replied to the double question. "There's my car just coming up, — and Lucy is at home. She's in a beastly humor."

Margaret laughed as she stepped on the piazza. "I don't believe she'll bite me. Where is she, up stairs?"

"Yes, with the door barricaded."

"This is serious," Margaret laughed again. "I hope I haven't broken into a pleasant little family party. Shall I go home?"

"She'll be all right with you," Spencer reassured her. "It's the most curious thing how unreasonable women are."

"Careful!" Margaret cautioned. "You're including me in that category! Are men the only ones entitled to wear halos?"

Spencer did not reply to her bantering question because he was at that moment seized with an inspiration. Perhaps this was one of the things he was waiting to give a chance to happen. He looked at her inquiringly: "Would you mind having a little chat with me before you see Lucy?"

"Why, no," she replied, concealing her surprise at the request and following him to the two chairs where he and his wife had recently been seated. "I don't remember ever having so long a visit with you before."

Spencer lost no time in getting down to his subject. "You're so intimate with Lucy that we don't need to mince matters," he began, "and she'll take a whole lot more from you than she will from me. I won't say any-

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thing about my side of the case, but some one ought to point out to her that every case has two sides. I'm not a saint, and no doubt I've given her plenty to object to, as is the case with most husbands, but when a fellow comes to a realization of it and tries to turn over a new leaf, it's tough to have his motives all misunderstood and be trampled on as if he was a nobody. Don't you think so?"

"I have no doubt about it," Margaret replied to his appeal.

Spencer was wonderfully encouraged. If Lucy would only listen to him like this instead of becoming so excited over the simplest statements! "I knew you would agree with me," he continued, "any sensible person would,—but Lucy isn't like anybody else —"

"Isn't that why you were first attracted to her?" Margaret interrupted.

"Perhaps it was," Spencer admitted; "but lately she has carried her individuality so far that she is impossible. You know her so well that we can talk perfectly frankly. She can't see anything but just one way, and I thought that perhaps you wouldn't mind — for her sake, you understand — pointing out to her that every one must yield something in order to be fair to every one else."

Spencer felt proud of his presentation of the case. It was the longest argumentative conversation he could remember to have held, and what he said sounded good to him. To this extent the new-born driving force was to be credited, but the result of what he heard himself say was to strengthen the idea which by this time gave him full justification.

"That is a splendid basis of life in general," Margaret said meditatively, referring to his last words. "Have

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you persuaded Lucy that you are prepared to live up to it?"

"That's just the point." Spencer was wondering how he could continue the conversation upon so high a plane, and Margaret gave him the escape he required. "Lucy won't see it, she is so hopelessly blinded by what she calls her 'rights.'" He laughed lightly. "Can you imagine any one as free as she is talking about 'rights'? It is really too ridiculous!"

Margaret was exceedingly interested, not so much in what Spencer said as in the closer knowledge of the man which the conversation gave her. She could easily understand how inadequately he measured up to the standard any high-strung woman would set for her husband, but since Lucy had succeeded in living with him as long as this, it might not be a foregone conclusion that the necessity of the end had as yet arrived. Up to this time she had known Spencer only through Ned's description, and she had accepted her husband's estimate that Lucy had but the children to look to as far as her future home life was concerned. Since she had found an opportunity to formulate her ideas at first hand, she was not sure that the situation was so desperate after all. Spencer spoke fairly enough, and in spite of his obvious limitations his apparently sincere desire to have matters smoothed out was decidedly a point in his favor. This might be her mission after all, Margaret reasoned, and the thought encouraged her to hear all which he had to say with patience and sympathy.

"Don't tell her that you have seen me," he urged as they both rose at length in response to Margaret's suggestion that perhaps she had better go to Lucy. "She wouldn't listen to anything if she knew we had talked

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matters over. Now I'll go on to Marblehead and leave her in your hands. You are very good to have listened to me so patiently. Perhaps I shouldn't have talked so freely, but I'm sure you understand."

"Yes, I understand," Margaret said, holding out her hand. "Now I'll run up stairs."

There was no response to Margaret's first gentle knock upon the door to the chamber, but her second effort was more successful. Curiosity often proves more potent than force, and Lucy was mystified by the unexpected intrusion. She knew that no one of the maids would come at this hour, and she would have dismissed from her mind any idea that it was her husband as the wildest of hallucinations. In the dim light she did not at first recognize Margaret, but the voice quickly disclosed the identity of the visitor.

"Do you want to be alone, — or shall I come in?" Margaret asked.

"Oh, come in," Lucy cried, kissing her. "Of course I don't want to be alone; I hate it."

By the intensity of the first remark Margaret could easily see that the force of the storm was not yet spent, but with a woman's intuition she sensed that the calm would come more naturally through confidences than through isolation.

"I would go down on the piazza with you, but I'm half-undressed," Lucy apologized. "Shall I slip something on?"

"Let's have our little visit right here," Margaret urged, seeing that she preferred it. "Ned's in New York," she explained, settling herself comfortably in an easy-chair. "I'm going to pick him up at the station at ten o'clock, so I thought I'd have an early dinner and motor down for a chat with you instead of staying alone at home."

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"I'm afraid you'll find me poor company," Lucy apologized; "but you're just in time to see the grand transformation."

There was a light in Lucy's eye which warned Margaret to speak carefully and to move cautiously. The words came fast and there was a hectic excitement which evidenced the turmoil within. Margaret was not as familiar with her moods as Ned was, but she recognized the condition and was glad to have happened in to serve as a buffer for the explosion which force of will alone held back. Lucy waited for no questioning, — it was enough to have a sympathetic listener.

"I am in this high state of elation," she continued, "because I've arrived at a definite conclusion; and that is a real achievement for me."

"It is for any one," Margaret agreed, feeling the necessity of saying something, and wondering whither the conversation was to lead.

"You're just in time," she repeated, "to see a new woman rising from the ashes of the old, — what do they call it? — phoenix, that's it. I'm a phoenix."

The heightened color in Lucy's cheeks, which showed plainly even in the deepening twilight; the carriage of her head, proud and rebellious in its angry pose; the imperious manner which replaced the usual unconvincing but appealing vivacity; the dominant note in the voice, — all gave force to the statement she made. She was already a new woman, different from the one Margaret had known, yet even this knowledge was not sufficient to explain the occasion of the change nor the climax to which it might lead.

Lucy's excitement was too intense to permit her to sit still, and her companion's sympathy too strong and

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understanding to break in upon her mood until it had spent itself. The tears were close to the surface, and Margaret would have been relieved to have the unnatural strain give way. For a moment Lucy leaned against the French window which swung open from the balcony leading from the room. "Another day of it will kill me!" she exclaimed, rather to herself than to Margaret. "I've tried to be some one else all summer, and what is the result? I've lost my friends, I've given myself a chance to discover how hopelessly impossible my husband is, and I have no longer any confidence in myself. I can't stand it, Peggy!" Then she held her arms full length before her. "I can't stand it, and I won't! I'm going to live my life again, in my own way. If this is indiscreet, as Ned says, then I was born for indiscretions, and I must take the consequences. No more sackcloth for me, — I'm going to live, live, live!"

The mention of Cunningham's name gave Margaret the key to the situation, and in a moment she was standing beside Lucy at the window, with her arm about her.

"You're all unstrung, dear," she comforted her as the tears came at last, and the proud head rested upon her shoulder. "You have taken what Ned has said to you far too seriously. No one has a right to go beyond cautioning a friend of danger which he may think exists without that friend's knowledge. He may overestimate the danger, or the friend may disregard it; that's all there is to it. If Ned has gone beyond that he has said more than he had a right to say. I am sure he would tell you the same if he were here."

"Look!" Lucy exclaimed, raising her head and pointing to the shore. "Think how utterly miserable that gull would be if you tried to make it assume the dignity of a

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swan. Yet that is just what I've been trying to do, Peggy. Come, let's sit down again. You and Ned are such normal creatures that you can't understand me at all. I must be an exotic of some kind, for I don't look at things the way other women do: I abominate housekeeping, I'm perfectly willing to let some one else take care of my children, and I don't see any harm in enjoying the companionship of other men when my own husband bores me to distraction. But I do know where to draw the line, and the greatest danger I have ever run is the possibility of having the Mrs. Grundys tear me into shreds; but they do that anyway, and the consequences can only fall on me."

For the first time Margaret fully understood. The unpleasant experience with Vallie was but an episode and not, as she had supposed, the real cause of Lucy's attitude. That fell back on Ned, and the responsibility which came with it made her tremble. All was clear now: Lucy had sought to atone for her single act of folly by following his advice to the letter, and by making himself her mentor he had gone beyond the point of safety. Fortunately, Margaret said to herself, an understanding of the exact situation had come to her in time.

"I wish you would tell Ned," Lucy said, continuing her conversation. "I don't dare to; he'll be very angry with me."

"I will tell him," Margaret answered, "and I will also tell him that he has gone too far in his advice."

"But he isn't to blame—" Lucy sprang to his defense, noting Margaret's attitude.

"No one is to blame," she replied. "Ned is very fond of you, as we all are, and after your foolish experience with him he felt it to be friendly to warn you against your impulses. That was all right, but he has no occasion to

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go further. You have taken that advice far too literally. Of course you must live your own life. Whether Ned or I or any others of your friends approve or disapprove cannot count against a natural expression of your real self. Your responsibility is only to your husband and your children and yourself."

"You're not going to give me up, are you?" Lucy demanded, sitting upright.

"You silly child!" Margaret laughed in spite of herself. "It is you who are giving us up! But we must be serious. Be yourself, Lucy, live your own life, as you say you are going to, and let us contribute to it all that any friends could; but don't forget that your husband and your children are a part of that life, and must always be. I'm sorry enough that the summer has been so dull for you, but I'm not sure that it has been without its compensations. It has given you a chance to think, and I'm sure it would be a grand thing if we all were forced to do that more than we are."

Lucy raised her hands despairingly. "I never want to think again," she exclaimed.

"Then, too, you certainly know your children better than you did —"

"Yes," she interrupted, "that is perfectly true. I'm not ready to accept them as playmates and companions to the exclusion of all others, but I have learned something about them."

"And your next problem, perhaps, will be that greatest one of all we women have to solve, — how to understand our husbands."

Lucy jumped to her feet. "Why do you bring him into the conversation?" she demanded. "I had forgotten him, and I don't want to be reminded. Forgive me,

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Peggy," she cried quickly and contritely, each new mood succeeding with astonishing rapidity, "I'm just as horrid as I can be; but Vallie does anger me so."

"Still, my dear —" Margaret spoke with great deliberation, "still, he *is* your husband after all, while Ned and I are only your friends."

MARGARET welcomed the opportunity which the intervening time gave her, as the car sped swiftly toward the city, to study the problem before the points which had now become clear were colored by the expression of her husband's opinions. The whole situation left an unpleasant impression upon her, and she felt the necessity of analyzing the causes and effects.

Arranged in the sequence of their importance, her first thought was why Lucy Spencer had allowed herself to be influenced by Ned's remarks to the extent of completely changing her life and making herself so utterly miserable. Such of his advice as she had heard was wise and friendly, but he must have said much more and have spoken more forcefully than she knew in order to produce such far-reaching results. Margaret could see clearly the remarkable change which had taken place, and she recognized that the Lucy who feared to tell Ned of her recent decision was not the irresponsible child who had earlier thrown her arms about his neck without exciting the slightest misunderstanding in Margaret's mind. The old impulsiveness had manifested itself during their present conversation, but Lucy's statements regarding her conclusions and intentions carried more weight with them than before. Margaret and Ned had done their best to serve her inter-

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ests as they had seen them, but after all there was no responsibility on either side beyond what each chose to accept. If Lucy saw fit to do this thing or that she had a perfect right to do it, and her anxiety to square the situation with Ned implied an obligation which Margaret was not ready to recognize.

From this point she passed to a consideration of the woman herself. In spite of the peculiar nature of their conversation, Lucy had never made upon her so favorable an impression. Contrary to her own fears, the former sprightliness and vivacity were not destroyed, but appeared to far greater advantage because of the new grace added by the quieter demeanor which the weeks of renunciation had wrought. She could never be the same Lucy again, Margaret believed, but she was already a far more fascinating woman than before. Again the disquieting suggestion forced itself into the consideration that if Ned admired her in her irresponsibility, and felt a protecting interest in her, he might become even more impressed when he felt the full charm of her present bearing. But Margaret reproached herself for harboring such a thought even for a moment, and put it aside as absolutely unworthy.

All in all she found herself in a curious predicament. She had become interested in Lucy solely at Ned's request and because she knew that it would be wiser for her to do so than for him, but in this more intimate acquaintance she herself had fallen beneath the spell of this contradictory yet compelling personality. At this very moment she blamed her for being the cause of the first thought of criticism which had ever come in her relation to her husband, yet with the blame came a sympathy and a desire to relieve which was entirely paradoxical. She demanded

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of herself why she should care what Lucy Spencer did, and in the same breath she wondered what she could do to make the problem more simple. As always, she found herself relying upon Ned for the final answer to her question, but in this present instance she determined to warn him that there were lions in the path.

She was quite herself again when Cunningham joined her at the station, and she lost no time in giving him a full account of her call and all that had come out of it. As she surmised, he received the news as a matter of serious moment, and long after they reached home they discussed it in the library. That is, Cunningham discussed it; at first Margaret took little part in the conversation. At length, however, she saw her opportunity to add a word of caution:

“Don’t you think we have interfered in her affairs as much as we really should?”

“I don’t look upon it as interference,” he replied, “and I don’t believe Lucy does. We — that is I have created a situation for the poor child which is impossible, and having got her into the predicament, surely I must see her through. I had no idea, of course, that she would go to extremes as she has done, but she has made a plucky fight, and it would be wrong to leave her to her own resources just when she needs us most.”

“Does it change your idea now that you know Vallie is not as indifferent as you thought?”

“Yes; and I shall urge her to meet him half way. I’ll write her a letter tonight. But from what you say it is evident that she is on the verge of doing the first foolish thing which pops into her head. Perhaps a word of advice will save her from making that mistake.”

Margaret did not reply, but Cunningham was too much

occupied by his thoughts to notice it. She watched him across the table, knowing his moods so well that there was no danger in his absorption that he would discover the intensity of her look. She wished for a moment that she might be a problem which would warrant such deliberation, then she chided herself for wishing it.

"That's what I must do," he said at length, rising and drawing his chair before the writing-table. "It would be better to talk it over, but there's no telling when I shall have a chance to see her. If Spencer has shown the slightest sign of trying to be half-decent, Lucy must encourage it."

"Must?" Margaret echoed.

"Yes," he said decisively; "she will do what I tell her."

As usual when his mind was made up, Cunningham lost little time in preliminaries. Margaret's eye still followed him as he drew a sheet of paper from the case and prepared to put his thought into execution. All else was forgotten now that he had focused his attention upon its single object. His wife felt it to be almost an isolation, and she could not pass it by.

"I wish you wouldn't get into it any deeper," she remarked quietly.

Cunningham, on the point of dipping his pen into the ink, looked up surprised. "You're not really serious?"

"Yes, I am. I think we both have done all we ought."

"Peggy, dear," he said with infinite feeling, reaching over and taking her hand in his, "you wouldn't have me leave undone any act which my friendship for that little girl prompts me to do? That isn't like you."

"I don't think it's safe," she insisted.

"What possible harm can come of a note urging her to meet her husband half-way? Come, tell me."

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It was difficult to oppose Cunningham in this mood. There was a persuasiveness in his frankness, an irresistible argument in his own conviction.

"Perhaps none," Margaret yielded; "but somehow I don't like to have you do it."

"I'll show you the letter. You shall say whether or not I shall send it. Isn't that fair?"

"Of course it is, dear." She bent down and kissed his forehead. "Your heart is so big that you take every one's troubles into it. Forgive me."

For half an hour Cunningham wrote, tore up and wrote again until he had satisfied himself with the letter; then he handed it to Margaret.

"I don't believe I ought to read it," she said; "it's really between you and Lucy."

"No," he corrected; "it's between us and Lucy. Please read it."

She took the letter. *My dear Lucy*, it began: *Margaret has given me your declaration of independence, but I refuse to see in it anything other than a message that your self-examination has shown you a strength which gives you confidence in yourself. She was right when she told you that you had taken my suggestions (for which you asked!) far too literally if you found in them any thought which restrained you from expressing your real self. We all must do that, but sometimes it takes us a little while to discover what that real self is.*

Some one has told me that Vallie has expressed a desire to turn over a new leaf. May it not be that he really means what he says, and that the moment has come when perhaps you may find in him what you think you have forever lost? We all are prone to think the day of miracles is past, and through force of habit to close our eyes to what is actually

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taking place. If he is now sincere, what he was need trouble you no longer. He has been selfish and neglectful, and undoubtedly has committed many indiscretions, but who has not been a fool sometime in his life? Who of us would 'scape the whipping post if all things were summed up? Therefore, not as wife alone, but as a fellow-creature, out of sympathy for the weaknesses he has shown, why not take him now at his own estimate and help him live up to it? Turn a deaf ear to what you may hear in his disfavor, and take him for what he may be rather than for what he is. You have been justly angry and disgusted, but it would be more than pity, if he really has gold in him, did you not seize any opportunity to help him to refine it. If we are wrong, we can laugh a little together and say "We meant well, and we made the trial." Am I asking too much? I think I know you well enough to answer my own question.

"There, dear; is there any harm in that? Is that interfering with her affairs?" Cunningham asked as she looked up.

Margaret smiled. "It is a sweet letter, Ned; and just like you," she answered, ignoring the second question.

It was just like him, not the letter alone, but the question. Keen, clever, astute in all matters which pertained to his profession, he himself was childlike in his disregard of self when it came to his relations with those in whom he felt the deepest interest. To others the manner could not appear other than didactic, but to Margaret who knew the trait so well it was simply his way of putting his whole soul into whatever he undertook. He had come to regard Lucy in the light of a case, and was devoting to it his most careful professional attention with all personality eliminated. He could advise a wife as to her proper conduct toward her husband and be perfectly oblivious to any

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thought that he was interfering in her affairs! He could not realize that his motives might be misconstrued. With his eyes fixed steadfastly on the goal, he plunged ahead, unmindful of the pitfalls because thus far he had escaped them. Margaret recognized the dangers, yet hesitated to interfere with that very characteristic which had brought him his success.

The letter reached Lucy on the following day and found her in the midst of her emancipation preparations. She had determined to celebrate the momentous event, and as a preliminary step had written notes or telephoned to those of her friends who had deserted her, as she expressed it, giving them a final opportunity to reaffirm their allegiance. She read it through with a puzzled expression, then sat down deliberately and reread it. What in the world could have happened! This was the first she had heard of Vallie's regeneration, and Ned must have some information which had been denied to her. After his recent disgraceful conduct, it was too bad of Vallie, she thought, to keep her in ignorance of this interesting state of affairs, but she was too deeply immersed in her present plans to give the matter as serious consideration as she would otherwise have done. She had swept him from her mind, preferring to center her thoughts upon more agreeable objects. Would the men respond to her call as they had at other times, or had she really relegated herself to a position which was beyond repair? She knew Auchester would come: he at least could be relied upon. She wanted to see him now that she was herself again, for she knew that he would compliment her on the change. How well he understood women! Never once had he failed to speak the words which she expected to hear in response to any expression she might make. His loyalty throughout these

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trying weeks encouraged her to believe that the others only awaited her summons, having misunderstood her unnatural attitude.

It had been so long since Lucy had planned any gaiety that even the thought of it filled her with pleasurable excitement. Goodbye forever to the drab days and the drab life! Her spirit craved companionship and admiration and joyous hours. She felt as if she were emerging after a long illness, and she craved a return to color after the plain white walls of the hospital. She walked out in the garden and was surprised that she had not noticed how the flowers were flourishing, impulsively breaking the stem of a gorgeous blossom and inhaling deep the fragrance of its petals. She wandered down to the shore, and the lapping of the waves made music which she had almost forgotten. As she returned she met Babs on her way down to the beach, and surprised the child by lifting her into her arms and covering the little face with kisses. She hummed softly to herself as she moved about the house, and seemed forgetful of all save happy memories. Life was sweet again, and she lived only in its intoxicating present.

Then the thought of Ned's letter returned, and she read it through once more. Dear, foolish old Ned! He had some idea in his mind even if she couldn't fathom it. Of course the letter demanded an answer, but she could not imagine what to say. Again she asked herself what had happened. Perhaps Margaret had met Vallie as she came in, and he had said something which she had misunderstood. That must be it. Gold in Vallie! If it were there, he would have discovered it long ago, had it assayed, and used it to pay some of his debts! But the letter must be answered, for Ned had meant well. Surely they would laugh about

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it afterwards, but not the way he meant. She sat down at the little Chippendale desk in her room and wrote:

O thou Conscientious One! You are a dear boy to write me such a letter when you know that I am rebellious over your tyranny; but you may as well give me up at once, for I can't live up to the picture. Life is too sweet to me and Convention too hideous in her awful righteousness. Let those who will rejoice in their dull, drab past. As for me, I'm practising some new steps for a dance with the Satyrs.

But Ned, who told you that yarn about Vallie?

The only new leaf he has turned over is in his check book. Don't waste any sympathy on him: save that for me — after the dance!

XXI

LUCY'S stag party was a complete success. Whatever hesitation the cautiously inclined among the men might have had vanished completely when its importance became known. Where one might have felt himself imprudent, many might venture with impunity. Lucy's affairs had been much talked of by those who still admired her and who really missed her vivacious personality. Her presence at any function changed it at once from still life to the sparkling effervescence of champagne, and the fact that she absented herself from her favorite summer haunts, together with Vallie's noticeable disinclination to be found at home, gave weight to more or less ugly gossip which might otherwise have died at birth. Some had it that a separation had already virtually taken place, and that Vallie only awaited a return to town before starting proceedings. Auchester's name was linked with Lucy's, and the coolness which had replaced the former intimacy between Spencer and the Captain was commented upon as significant. Others insisted that Cunningham was the man in the case, but these rumors appeared to come from feminine sources and were laughed at by the men. Then the principals changed places and Lucy was to be the aggressive one. From the men's standpoint this appeared far more plausible, for they all

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knew that Vallie had been going the pace, laying himself open to all sorts of complications if his wife knew of them and felt disposed to take advantage. So, in spite of her belief that she had dropped out of mind as well as out of sight, Lucy was still a factor in the lives of those with whom she had previously trained.

The unusual invitation was not only an agreeable one to accept, but it whetted the curiosity of all. Miller and Hayden boasted on board the "Sylph," chaffing Spencer because he had heard nothing of it, and commiserating Eustis, whose omission showed that he was held partly responsible for Vallie's backsliding. Langdon, fatigued by his summer's work, welcomed the opportunity of seeing Lucy again with the same avidity that another man would have tossed off three fingers of raw whisky. Archie Reed placed his car at the disposal of his friends for the occasion, evidently feeling safer to appear with a body-guard, to avoid possible complications with a jealous husband. Auchester had his own ideas upon the subject, which he kept carefully to himself; but all approached the event with such anticipation that had the hostess known the exact state of affairs she would willingly have passed through another similar period of retirement in order to produce so dramatic a climax.

She had made it clear that with the single exception of herself it was distinctly a stag affair. With characteristic daring Lucy plunged all on this coup. She would test her friends and herself in such a way that there could be no possible misunderstanding. If her reign over her little court was but ephemeral, she preferred to know it now and adapt herself to established conditions. She was to be the only attraction, and if the magnet had lost its power then she would accept her fate as best she could.

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It was a gorgeous August afternoon, and Lucy moved about the house and through the grounds in an ecstasy of joy as she inspected the final details. The pergola was transformed into a miniature buffet, where her guests might choose such liquid refreshments as their thirst would indicate. Three tables were laid on the piazza for auction, for Lucy did not intend to depend wholly upon conversation to make the time go pleasantly, and inside, in the dining-room, preparations were completed for an enticing spread, planned especially to capture the masculine palate.

Auchester was the first to arrive. Curiously, Lucy had expected this, and again the Captain had done exactly what she knew he would do. He looked into her face a full minute before he spoke, and she did not need to await his words to sense his admiration.

"By Jove! you are a picture!" he exclaimed. "Say what you will about these tedious weeks, they have given you a chance to rest and have made you more wonderful than ever."

Lucy smiled contentedly. This was more like old times. "You always say something to cheer me up," she replied, "and I owe much to you. Without you I never could have endured it."

"I wish I dared ask you a question," he suggested.

"Don't you?" she laughed.

"By Jove, I will! Why did you let Cunningham persuade you into anything so stupid, and why have you thrown over his advice?"

"I can't answer both questions at once." Lucy was in the rarest good humor. "He said some things about my conduct which I have no doubt were justified. Every one, even you, tells me that the results are beneficial,

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so I feel myself under obligations to Ned. As to his advice, I don't know that I have 'thrown it over,' as you say. He has told me always to express my real self, and this is my first opportunity to make that expression."

"Is he to be here this afternoon?"

"No; this is a bachelors' party, and I'm the most confirmed bachelor of all."

"But you didn't ask him, did you?" Auchester insisted.

"No," she admitted. "I couldn't very well without inviting Margaret, and I wanted you men all to myself."

"Will your husband be here?" he inquired further.

Lucy's eyes flashed. "No," she said, "I hope not. I hate him! If he comes, it will be only because he knows it will annoy me."

"You hate him?" Auchester repeated meaningfully, drawing closer to her. "Do you mean that?"

"Every word of it. I wish I might never see him again."

"And you're going to live your own life?"

"If I don't now it's my own fault," she laughed.

"How about conventions?"

"To the winds with them," she cried gaily. "Let the Mrs. Grundys talk! Life is too sweet, companionship too dear to let every one else do your thinking for you. Come and see what I have arranged in the pergola."

The Captain was on the verge of losing his quiet self-restraint. Lucy had no way of knowing that these weeks had been hard ones for him as well. Before Cunningham's influence had gained such complete control over her, Auchester believed that the progress he was making was substantial. He rejoiced that circumstances gave him the opportunity of becoming a necessity to her; but when he found that in spite of everything she failed utterly to read in his words or actions the great fact which

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now dominated him, he began to fear that he had misunderstood her after all. The return of the old note in her voice as she talked with him over the telephone, unfolding her plans and seeking his advice, gave him courage to believe that his own moment was nearer at hand than he had feared. Once more in her presence, with a return of the vivacity which had recently been lacking, he began where he had left off, and rejoiced at what her words told him. The time was propitious: he would take advantage of it.

"Then you have come to my way of thinking?" he said, continuing their conversation after expressing his admiration for Lucy's preparations.

"About conventions? Yes. A woman is a fool to let them stand in the way of her happiness."

"At last you have learned the secret of life!" he exclaimed. "Now that we have solved it, why may we not experience its joys together?"

"We may," she replied, smiling. "Those who read in life the same messages should surely enjoy them together. Of course we may."

The Captain took her hand gently and raised it gallantly to his lips. "Then let us begin to plan at once," he said. "You have given me a happiness I have never felt before."

There was an intensity in his words which frightened her. She was not accustomed to intense people and was at a loss to reply. Fortunately for her embarrassment, at this moment Archie Reed's motor stopped at the steps and she left the Captain, to greet the new arrivals.

"Good boys, all," she cried. "I knew you wouldn't forget me!"

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"We really thought you wanted to be let alone," Reed explained.

"Well, it's all over now. Come up and let me look at you."

Leading one by each hand, and with the others following behind, Lucy pulled them to the pergola, standing them in a row, with their backs to the table where the cigars and bottles were in evidence. "There!" she said, drawing a step back and surveying them. "This is a new game of Tantalus, and you shan't have anything until I've given my eyes their glad surprise. I've been in a trance all summer, but now I've come to life. Break ranks and enjoy yourselves! Bertie, mix Martinis for us all, and then I ask you to drink to the reborn Lucy. And I'll drink with you, for that's a toast I won't sit down to."

Her mood was contagious and frivolity ruled. The remaining guests arrived without disturbing the preparations, and quietly joined the crowd of men about her.

"We can't give you the toast here, Lucy," Hayden cried; "up on the table with her!"

"Your hand, Captain," Lucy responded, placing her slippered foot in his palm and her hand upon his shoulder. "Now—one, two, three!" and she lightly sprang to the center of the table near by.

"Flowers for our queen!" Archie Reed shouted, stripping a vase of its fragrant contents and handing them up to her.

"The toast — the toast!" they cried.

"To woman!" Miller suggested.

"To love!" Langdon urged.

"To life!" Lucy insisted, holding her glass high above her; "for that includes all. To life which was made for

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you and for me and for happiness. I pledge you deep, my friends."

She handed the glass down to Hayden and then turned again to her guests, unwilling yet to relinquish her exalted position. "Love, you say!" she turned to Langdon. "Love is but a part of life, only a part, and I want it all! See — I love you, every one." She separated the flowers, and pressing them separately to her lips, tossed them to the men below her. Then she jumped lightly down from the table.

With so propitious a start, the afternoon advanced on golden wings. For a time they played at auction, Lucy being progressed from one table to another, to show no partiality. Then, at length, the men attacked the spread in the dining-room.

"I can't eat eleven ices," she laughed, gazing hopelessly at the men standing or kneeling in various attitudes before her; "and I can't accept any one, so I'll go and get my own. You mustn't treat me as a woman: I hate women, my old self included. Now I'm a comrade with you all, and we must play together just that way. The new Lucy is just your pal — will you accept her?"

Langdon stepped forward with a fresh bottle of champagne.

"Get your glasses," he commanded, and with the dignity attendant upon a religious rite he gave each his portion. "Drink to Lucy, our comrade: all for one and one for all. Long life and prosperity!"

Later, as she waved goodbye to them, she brushed back the strands of hair which had become loosened from the mass and, with tears in her eyes, turned to Auchester, who still remained. "Isn't it dear of them?"

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she cried. "Oh, it's worth all to know that they do like me. I feel a thousand years younger already!"

"I waited so that we might complete our plans," he suggested.

"Our plans? Oh, yes; I remember."

"Where will you meet me?"

"Anywhere on the face of the globe," she answered, her face radiant. "I never was so happy in all my life."

"Is there any place we could dine together next week, to talk matters over at length?"

"Why don't we go to 'Spicer's'?" Lucy asked. "I haven't been there all summer, and I'd love to."

"'Spicer's,'" the Captain repeated, writing the name on his cuff. "What night shall we say?"

"Why not Tuesday?"

"Tuesday it is," he assented. "I'll telephone to arrange about picking you up in a car. Lucy," he continued, calling her by name for the first time, "you're the jolliest little girl the Lord ever made, and I'm the luckiest man."

XXII

SPICER'S roadhouse, situated a few miles inland from the North Shore, was a favorite rendezvous for automobile parties, and Spicer's chicken dinners were justly famous. Nothing was more natural than that this should have suggested itself to Lucy as an agreeable meeting place with any one, when Auchester so unexpectedly put the question to her. At the moment she was intoxicated by the joy of popularity, and life seemed to contain for her nothing but heavenly possibilities. It would never occur to Vallie to take her there, Cunningham had not invited her, she could not go alone, and she really wanted to go: here again the Captain had not disappointed her.

The arrangements seemed simple enough as Auchester telephoned them: at the appointed hour Lucy was to walk up the road toward Manchester until he overtook her; then they would motor to "Spicer's," where they would dine and pass the evening together. It seemed curious that he should not call at the house for her, and she could not understand why he declined her suggestion of using her own car; but it was the Captain's party and she had formed the habit of respecting his judgment.

Lucy's cheeks glowed with pleasurable excitement as

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she casually left the house as if merely for a stroll soon after twilight began to fall. Her anticipation of the enjoyment ahead of her was in no way tempered by any suspicion of regret. Curiously enough, such twinges of conscience as had come since her declaration of independence acknowledged their obligation to Cunningham rather than to her husband. But even he must realize that it was necessary for her to find some excitement in order to prevent actual stagnation, and she could imagine no logical reason why he should object in the slightest to the plan which she and Auchester had formed for this particular evening. Yet — in spite of all — she had never done just this thing before, and perhaps it was the novelty of the experience which brought the blood to her cheeks and supplied the slight touch of color which her costume seemed to demand. That it added to the attractiveness of the picture she presented could not be denied, least of all by the Captain, whose whole expression bespoke his approval as he stepped gallantly from the car and assisted her into it.

"My word!" he exclaimed, without the formality of the usual greetings, "you should always wear white. You are simply marvelous!"

"I love white," Lucy admitted; "I wish I could wear it always. It is hardly practical for automobiling, but tonight I wish to do you credit; and I do think white becomes me best."

"Credit?" he asked. "With whom?"

"There are sure to be loads of people at 'Spicer's.'"

Auchester glanced at her curiously, but all he remarked was his noncommittal "Oh!" "I say," he exclaimed a moment later as the motor ran along the narrow, closely wooded path after leaving the shore road, "why hasn't

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some one taken me in here before? This is simply ripping."

"It is wonderful," she replied, glad to see an approach to her own enthusiastic mood on the part of the Captain. "Did you ever know of such a combination of shore and country! And can you wonder that after once learning to know it we are never satisfied to spend our summers anywhere else?"

"Do you know English country life at all?" he asked abruptly.

"No," she answered; "but it surely can't equal this."

"It is different," Auchester admitted, "but I think you will enjoy it."

"Spicer's" was more famed for its dinners than for its architecture, and Auchester was frankly shocked by its low, rambling, unfinished appearance. "Is this the place?" he queried. "Is this a roadhouse? It looks to me more like a stable."

Lucy laughed. "You can never tell the quality of a hotel by the appearance of the 'bus at the station," she said. "I learned that the first time I went to Europe. It isn't much to look at, I'll admit, but 'Spicer's' is *the* place on the North Shore."

"Then it must have been Spicer himself I talked with on the telephone, and he must have discovered the fact you have just stated. He snubbed me with the grace of a grand duke, and I promised myself the pleasure of a word with him on arrival."

"There's the fighting blood once more," Lucy laughed again; "but please don't do it. He would be sure to send us away without dinner if he didn't like you, and that would be an awful pity."

"You're not serious, I'm sure?" the Captain queried.

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"Absolutely. In America, summer hotel-keepers occupy a position just above the aristocracy, and Spicer lives on a pinnacle just above them! You must be civil to him."

Auchester's inaudible reply was still further lost in the bustle of arrival. As the car stopped, a servant appeared to assist the newcomers to alight, and to lead the way into the spacious hallway. Here they were met by Spicer himself, and Lucy was relieved to observe that the Captain exercised restraint and permitted himself to be amused by the pompous airs of the proprietor. Spicer himself was affected by the Captain's affability, and after directing the boy who had met them to lead the way to the second floor, he graciously followed them to the foot of the stairway.

"I am confident you will find everything satisfactory, Mr. Arbuckle," he said as he left him.

Lucy turned quickly. "He called you Mr. Arbuckle," she said. "Why are we going up stairs?"

"We have a private room," he explained; "it will be much pleasanter."

She made no further remonstrances, but followed the guide into a small dining-room which opened out onto a balcony in the rear of the house. In the center of the room was a round table, set for two, the china being almost concealed by the enormous bunch of American Beauty roses. Lucy exclaimed as she rushed to the table and buried her face in the fragrant flowers. Then she stepped from the table to the little balcony, exchanging the fragrance of the roses for the balsam of the pines. When she turned again the boy had left the room, closing the door behind him, and she saw Auchester standing there, watching her enjoyment with a smile which reflected his own satisfaction.

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"Odors affect me just as they do you," she said. "I never could explain it exactly, but I find them more intoxicating than wine."

"Everything that is beautiful is intoxicating." The Captain took a step nearer and relieved her of the slight wrap which hung over her arm. "Wine is the coarsest of intoxicants; a beautiful woman the most delicate."

The waiter was prompt in his service, so they sat down without ceremony to test the great Spicer's reputation. But the courses had not progressed far when Lucy realized that some one had added to the usual routine of the chicken dinner. One delicacy after another, some quite new to her, found their way to her plate. Auchester watched her growing excitement with interest.

"Where — where did you find all these things?" she demanded.

"After traveling the world over for twenty years one should be able to find some curiosities. Your rose-leaf conserve put me on my mettle."

"Yes; but how did you get them here?"

"A friend in New York searched them out for me, and they arrived just in time."

"No wonder Spicer snubbed you when you suggested improving his dinner! Now I understand. How delicious this wine is!"

"Just another aroma to transport us to a land of romance, — this time to Italy. I dream of the time when we shall see it together."

Lucy looked up quickly, but the waiter had just entered the room to bring the coffee and cigarettes.

"Leave us," Auchester said abruptly to the boy, handing him a bill; "we shall require nothing further." Then turning to his companion, he held out the box of cigarettes.

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She took one mechanically, his last remark giving significance to what he had said earlier. "What did you mean about my enjoying English country life and our seeing Italy together?"

Auchester struck the match against the box and held it before her, the light of the flame throwing the features of her face into beautiful relief. "We live always in the future," he replied. "Anticipation is the food the heart thrives upon."

Lucy looked full into his eyes for a long moment as the fact came to her at last that Auchester loved her. Until then she had accepted him as a man from whose heart all thought of sentiment and romance had been eliminated by the wonderful experiences which could come only to one unhampered by domestic responsibilities. He had told her so, and she believed him. She could not understand how any man, having once learned the advantages of freedom, could voluntarily exchange it for the restricted limitations which marriage must impose. Judgment was not to be expected of youth, swept off its feet by romantic expectations, seldom realized; for youth could not draw lessons from observation nor temper its sentiment by mature conclusions. From a woman's standpoint all was different, but in her own case the present situation seemed equally impossible. The Captain's conversation on the subject of marriage came back to her now with a definite significance. "If you met some one whom you really loved," he had said. Then he had thought —

She rose abruptly and stepped out onto the balcony. The darkness had come on during the extended time which they had given to the dinner, and nothing outside was discernible except the weird outlines of the pine branches,

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through which the wind soughed gently. Lucy stood so long looking out into the darkness, drawing silently at her cigarette from time to time, that Auchester finally crossed the room and stood beside her.

"You don't regret so soon the step you've taken?" he said, half reproachfully.

His words recalled her to herself. The first surprise had given way to wonder, and this in turn was succeeded by that sweet intoxication which comes with the first knowledge of love. It was a new experience to Lucy. When Vallie had asked her to marry him there had been little of the sentimental about it. They had attracted each other and the match seemed an appropriate one, so, as Lucy had told Cunningham, before either of them fully realized it, the die was cast. But here was a man of a different stripe, whose personality could but appeal to any woman, whose judgment was tempered by experience and maturity. Until this moment it had not occurred to her to ask herself that question which the head always demands of the heart, but it was not strange that when the truth finally dawned her first sensation was that of unexplained happiness. To her who had been self-centered only because she had never learned to love, it was a lifting of the veil, disclosing in life a beauty of which she had never dreamed.

"Do you mean that you love me?" she whispered, making no answer to his question.

"Can you doubt it!" he cried, slipping his arm about her waist and gently drawing her to him.

Like a tired child she suffered him to fold her in his arms. Her eyes closed, and her head rested against his shoulder. "Oh! it is sweet to be loved!" she murmured, "oh! it is sweet!"

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It was only a dream to Lucy—a rare, delicious dream which took her back to the time when she would creep into her father's arms and find there a surcease of her childish troubles. But man-like, Auchester must seal his triumph, and gently raising her head he pressed his lips against hers. In a moment the dream was ended and Lucy drew back from him, standing unsteadily but with arm upraised, refusing his support. She passed her hand across her forehead as if bewildered. She was not angry, but rather seemed confused and not fully comprehending her surroundings.

“What am I doing!” she exclaimed weakly. “Why, I’m married, so of course you can’t love me.”

“To others that would prove an obstacle; to us who recognize that without love there is no marriage, it is merely an impediment.”

“What does it mean?” she asked, still confused. “I don’t understand at all.”

“It means that you and I will leave behind us these scenes which have been painful to you as soon as you say the word. It means that we will go together to Italy, where I will begin to make up to you these loveless years, until you can obtain your divorce; and then I will take you to England to my ancestral home.”

“But I couldn’t leave Vallie and the children, even if —”

“Why concern yourself about him when he never thinks of you? As for the children, I should strive to give them what their own father never has.”

“Surely you’re not serious?” Lucy said. “It all seems so unreal and so impossible. I’m trying to comprehend what you are saying.”

Auchester looked at her in amazement. “Did you not

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mean it the other day when you said that you wished never again to see your husband?"

"Why, yes, I presume I did; but I've often said that."

"He is nothing to you, — and I love you, Lucy, with all the strength of twenty years of waiting! For I have been waiting, dear, waiting for just such a woman as you are; and I thought you understood."

"But I'm married," she insisted again. "Whatever might have happened otherwise, it's too late now."

"Not if you love me," he urged. "It was never meant that man and woman should live together as you and Spencer do. Love is the tie that really binds."

"I know," Lucy admitted; "but I'm not sure that I should love you even if I were free. Perhaps I should, for I do like you, and I enjoy being with you more than any one, but I never thought it possible to have love enter my life. I've never seriously thought of leaving Vallie, for after all I've become used to him. Of course it might be, but that would mean pain for us both, for it's too late."

Auchester's expression changed and he spoke almost fiercely. "Then when you suggested our coming here you had nothing else in mind than having dinner together? Had you not considered whether or not you loved me when you made this appointment?"

"Why, no. It was just another of my impulses, I suppose. I always enjoy being with you, and I have been so happy since I became myself again. I thought you understood. What else could I have meant?"

"What else?" Auchester repeated after her. "Good God! what a mockery! Listen! I thought you loved me, Lucy, and were through with the life your husband's neglect forces you to lead; I thought you had read in my heart the

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passion which expresses the longing of a soldier for the woman whom he believes should be his mate; I thought that your independence lifted you above mere conventions, and that having learned what you had become to me, you were ready to cut the knot with a single stroke, leave the old distressing scenes behind you, and blaze a path with me into the unknown which is always kinder than the known. That is what I thought, that is what I believed you meant when you came here with me tonight."

Lucy's confusion disappeared as Auchester continued to speak. "You thought me that kind of woman," she exclaimed quietly, but with a world of force in her voice. "You have known me these months and could believe that? Please let me go home at once."

"Not yet." The Captain held out his arm protestingly. "Not until you hear me out. I have told you what I thought; now I tell you what I know, and you must listen. I am a soldier, Lucy, and a soldier's ideas of life are different, for the camp is not the drawing-room. But his ideas of manhood are the same, however much he may have learned to disregard conventions. You shall not go from me tonight until I have made you understand that I have offered you no disrespect, nor treated you other than as the one woman I could wish to make my wife. Such apologies as are required belong to your husband, but I have disregarded him because he has disregarded himself. Now that I know your feelings in the matter — that you do not regard me as I thought you did, and that conventions do mean something to you in spite of your false conviction that you disregard them — I ask you to believe me when I say that I respect them all. If you felt as I do, that would be different; as you do not, I can

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do nothing other than accept your code. Will you believe me, Lucy?"

"Yes," she replied, holding out her hand; "it has been my fault, and I thank you for understanding me. But now I must go home. I didn't know you were to have a private room, — and the name you gave, — we've acted like two foolish children!"

Lucy started ahead of Auchester, but half-way down the stairs she turned. "I've forgotten my wrap," she said.

As he went back she continued, but when near the foot she found a merry party of young people awaiting their cars. Instinctively she drew back, but she saw that she had been observed, and recognized Mrs. Channing, evidently chaperoning her daughters and their friends. Retreat was impossible, so with her sweetest smile she advanced to greet them, praying inwardly that the Captain might hear her voice and remain in the background.

"What a jolly party!" she exclaimed, nodding cheerfully to several whom she knew, who came forward to meet her.

Mrs. Channing's response was less cordial, and Lucy felt the necessity of appeasing the resentment which she knew had reason to exist.

"What should we do without 'Spicer's'!" she said to her, with a smile which sank no deeper than her lips. "He is an oasis in the desert of domestic ennui. Surely you will grant that this form of excitement is quite harmless, even to your young charges."

"Your husband is getting the car?" Mrs. Channing asked.

"Yes—that is, I expect him every moment."

"I didn't see you in the dining-room."

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"No; Mr. Spicer always lets me dine upstairs when I am alone."

"I should hardly think one of your temperament would find that particularly enjoyable," Mrs. Channing continued, subjecting her to a careful scrutiny.

"Oh, dear, yes," Lucy responded with a nervous laugh. "I come here whenever I find it stupid at home. Sometimes one's own company is the best company of all."

"Your husband is not here?" she persisted.

"Not yet; I expect him every minute," Lucy lied cheerfully, encouraged by the fact that Auchester had not appeared.

By this time the party had reduced itself to Mrs. Channing and her daughters, and their car was at the door. "We ought not to leave you alone here at this time of night," she said doubtfully, evidently debating between inclination and propriety.

"Oh! I'm all right," Lucy hastened to assure her, eager to be relieved of her embarrassment. "Mr. Spencer is sure to be here in a moment."

The words were hardly spoken when Cunningham came in through the open door. He gazed on the scene before him for a moment, showing unmistakable signs of relief.

"The car is waiting for you, Lucy," he said.

Mrs. Channing gave her a look full of significance. "If I meet Mr. Spencer on the way home I'll tell him that you are already provided for," she said triumphantly, majestically sailing out of the room, driving her daughters ahead of her with the same protective air which Niobe is said to have exhibited upon a similar occasion.

XXIII

CUNNINGHAM failed to grasp the situation. As the Channings left the hallway Lucy sank onto the nearest chair in a state of nervous collapse. He quickly stood beside her.

"Lucy," he said, "where is Auchester?"

"You've made an awful mess of things," was her only reply. "How did you know that I was here?"

"Susette tried to reach Margaret and I took the message. Babs was ill —"

"My baby ill!" Lucy cried, springing to her feet.

"It's nothing serious — I stopped at the house on the way down, — but Susette was worried. She said that you inquired something about 'Spicer's' yesterday. After what you wrote me I was anxious. I called Auchester up at his club, and the motor service man said he had hired a car to go to 'Spicer's'. Now you understand."

She relaxed again as soon as he reassured her regarding Babs. "Did you hear what Mrs. Channing said as she went out?" she asked.

"I'm not concerned with her," he insisted with a slight show of impatience. "Is Auchester still here?"

"Yes," she answered; "but you are concerned with Mrs. Channing, whether you wish to be or not. She thinks that you and I have dined together."

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"I care nothing about what she thinks or does not think of me. Look at me, Lucy. What about Auchester?"

She sprang to her feet indignantly. "You too, Ned? This is too much! I came here to dine with Captain Auchester because nobody else cares whether I ever dine or not. We have had a beautiful evening and were just leaving when we ran into the Channing party. There has been nothing which is not perfectly proper, and I won't stand your insinuations. That old cat has reason to hate me and to put the worst possible construction on everything I do, but you have been my friend and I have the right to expect something better from you."

"It is because I am your friend that I have rushed here as fast as a motor could bring me, to give you the fullest expression friendship can make. But it is not 'perfectly proper' for you to be here alone with Captain Auchester until after midnight, and you know it is not."

"Is it as late as that? I had no idea —"

"The hour makes little difference; the fact remains."

"Is it any more proper for me to be here alone with you than with him?"

"Perhaps not; but I am protecting your husband's interests—"

"You have no right to suggest that Captain Auchester is less considerate."

"May I not speak for myself?" Auchester interrupted calmly, coming toward them from the stairway.

"There will be ample opportunity for you to do so later," Cunningham replied. "Since you have been willing to withhold yourself from the events which have just

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been happening, your patience will undoubtedly serve you until tomorrow."

"Of course you understand that I have refrained from taking part solely in the interests of Mrs. Spencer."

"Then you, at least, appreciate how serious this is. Mrs. Spencer does not."

"I think we can easily explain —"

"You owe me no explanation, — that belongs to Mr. Spencer. In the meantime I shall see to it that she returns to him without further delay."

"I am going back with Captain Auchester," Lucy insisted firmly.

"You are going back with me," Cunningham replied with finality. "My car is waiting."

She was no match for Cunningham when thus determined, but still was in no mood to comply. She looked helplessly from one to the other.

"It will be wiser to follow Mr. Cunningham's advice," Auchester said quietly. "This is no place for discussion. Please let me help you into his motor."

"Mrs. Spencer requires no assistance beyond my own," Cunningham said brusquely. "Come, Lucy, we are losing time which may prove important."

"May I call at your office tomorrow?" Auchester asked Cunningham.

"You may call whenever you like. Whether I see you or not depends upon circumstances."

"There are certain claims which one gentleman always has upon another," the Captain said with much dignity.

"If your claims are those of a gentleman, you may rest assured that I shall recognize them."

Lucy had risen, and without waiting for either of the men she passed out of the door and quickly seated her-

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self in the tonneau. Cunningham followed close behind and took the seat beside her, giving his chauffeur the signal to start the machine.

Neither one spoke until the car was well along on the Shore Drive. Lucy's mortification had taken the form of indignation, and Ned came in for it all. If he had not assumed to constitute himself her natural protector she felt sure that she could have handled the situation, and all would have been well. His unexpected appearance at just the wrong moment had seemed to give her the lie, and she knew that Mrs. Channing would not be slow to take advantage of her long-awaited opportunity. And he had humiliated her before Captain Auchester. He had forced her to obey as if she had been a child, and she resented it.

Cunningham sensed her attitude, and as a matter of fact felt as little inclined to talk. He was deeply concerned as to the possible outcome of the affair, as he knew, both from personal observation and from what rumor had told him, that Spencer would not be averse to discover any excuse, however trivial, which might divert attention from certain irregularities of his own which were likely to be brought to light at any moment. Cunningham's sympathy was entirely with Lucy. He appreciated how meager were her resources now that her husband practically disregarded her entirely. Yet he could see, where she could not, the danger which hovered over her as she strove so desperately to find enjoyment. It had been her good fortune, he told himself, that up to this time she had been thrown with men who like himself were amused and entertained by her lack of conventionality, but who respected her artlessness too much ever to take advantage of it. But her new playmate, he felt sure, was a man

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of different caliber, and there was no doubt in Cunningham's mind that at the present time Lucy faced a real danger.

Yet there were words to be spoken before the Spencers' house was reached, and Cunningham at last broke the silence. "Dare I offer you a bit of advice?" he asked at length.

"I credit you with courage enough, even for that," she retorted.

"What are you going to tell Vallie about tonight, if you have to tell him anything?"

"I presume I shall lie to him, just as he would to me."

"May I urge you to tell him the exact truth, and in that way minimize the risk you have run?"

"Why don't you talk it over with him yourself if you know so well how to handle it? I will retain you as my counsel, and place the case in your hands."

"You are ungenerous, Lucy," he replied patiently; "but it is perhaps too much to expect anything else under the circumstances. What other motive could I possibly have to mix up in this affair except to serve you?"

"Your overwhelming desire to prove me an irresponsible child," she said crossly. "I am quite able to protect myself without this surveillance which you force upon me, and I should be relieved if I could make you believe me."

"I can't believe you until I see you strong enough to control your impulses," Cunningham insisted. "You have asked Margaret and me to help you, and we both believed that the request was sincere. You can't put friendship on and off like an old glove, — it is too vital a force. Having once gained a foothold it must dominate all other thoughts, even if at times it hurts and fails to be appreciated."

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She did not respond, and Cunningham saw that she was in no way appeased.

"After tonight you may call our friendship ended if you choose, but until I have completely satisfied the demands which it makes upon me I cannot conscientiously do less than I am doing. Your impulses make you weak, Lucy, and Heaven knows that the world is far more pitiless of weakness than it is of sin."

"The world is far less pitiless than you," she exclaimed, her heart at last crying out in its suffering. "You sit there in your complacency and try to break me on the wheel. You shan't do it, Ned Cunningham. It isn't the act of a friend and it isn't manly. I know I'm weak, but I have a right to be because I'm a woman. I know that I'm a creature of impulses, but they're not evil ones and they do no one any harm. You can't even let me enjoy one evening with a friend who is agreeable company, after weeks of almost complete isolation, just because this friend happens to be a man. It isn't fair, Ned, and you shan't do it."

The machine turned into the Spencers' driveway.

"Here we are," Cunningham exclaimed, making no attempt to reply. "My one hope is that Vallie may still be detained on board the 'Sylph.'"

"Oh, that won't make any difference," Lucy replied indifferently. "If he doesn't hear about it tonight, Mrs. Channing will take good care that it isn't overlooked. Trust her for that."

Cunningham's prayer was not answered, for Vallie was not only at home, but evidently awaited Lucy's return. The engine had scarcely come to a standstill when he appeared coming toward the head of the steps leading from the piazza.

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"Don't stop," Lucy said as Ned helped her out; "I would rather have you go."

"I have no idea of running away," he insisted, closing the door and placing his hand beneath her elbow as they walked up the steps. Spencer came forward to meet them and peered into Cunningham's face.

"Hullo, Vallie," Ned greeted him as naturally as he could in the face of an overpowering desire to seize him by the throat and choke back his insolence.

"It's you, is it?" Spencer replied in an ugly mood. "What are you doing here at one o'clock in the morning?"

"What you ought to be doing." Cunningham met the issue squarely, and his retort was so unexpectedly direct that Vallie drew back with a moment's hesitation.

"Good-night, Lucy," Cunningham continued, holding out his hand and paying no attention to Spencer. "Margaret will be down to see you some day this week."

As Lucy turned into the house Cunningham started toward the car, but Spencer had recovered his former belligerent attitude. "I'm not through with you yet," he said. "What do you mean by your confounded impudence?"

"Don't be a fool," Cunningham replied, pausing for a moment. "I have no desire to be disagreeable, and you have no right to be. Let's forget it. Good-night."

"It's because you think I'm a fool that you run me like this," Vallie continued. "I've let you and the other men jolly me so long at the club that you think you can do anything you like with me, but there are limits. I'm getting tired of it, and the sooner you understand it the better for all concerned. I don't intend to have you or any other man trailing around my wife and giving people

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a chance to talk about it. Take it from me, it's got to stop."

Cunningham retraced his steps until he stood directly in front of him. "Look here, Spencer," he said, "if you insist on prolonging this conversation it may be that you'll hear something that won't be pleasant. I'm a fairly patient man, but you're getting close to my limitations. You know as well as I do that it's all poppycock as far as talk about Lucy and me or Lucy and any other man is concerned. If you don't buck up and remember that you have a wife, and give her something to think about besides herself, you can't blame her if she does do something foolish, just to break the monotony. But if there's any talk going around about any woman, it's some one other than Lucy, and the man in the case doesn't stand very far from me at this moment."

"What business is it of yours, confound you?"

"None, except when you try to drag some one else into your class. Then I make it my business."

Spencer laughed disagreeably. "As a matter of fact there is a good deal more talk about you and Lucy than you have any idea. I haven't paid any attention to it, because we've been friends. But I'm not a fool, and sometimes near-scandal sounds a whole lot worse than the real thing. You take it from me that unless you cut it out the worm will turn."

"I hope it will." Cunningham's disgust gained the better of his judgment. "I have great respect for worms after they actually do turn, and very little until they have accomplished the metamorphosis. Good-night."

XXIV

WHEN Auchester called at Cunningham's office the following morning he was given immediate audience. In spite of his prejudice, Cunningham had discovered something in the man's words and manner which interested him. He was relieved, the evening before, to have Spencer vent his spleen upon his head, for that of course could do no possible harm, while to associate Auchester's name with Lucy's would indeed be serious. He congratulated himself upon the fortunate accident which made it possible for him to step into the breach, and he was sure that when "the child," as he so frequently spoke of her, had time to think things over, she would be as grateful to him as she was now incensed. But whatever the result, Cunningham knew that he had done his duty and there was a certain grim satisfaction in that. Margaret would be interested in this latest *dénouement*, and he regretted that in his haste to get down to his office this morning there had not been time to give her the details. Now Auchester had come, and he would have a fuller story to repeat when he returned home that evening.

Cunningham was mistaken if he expected the Captain to appear as an embarrassed man. Auchester's quiet

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dignity was one of his greatest assets, and his whole bearing marked him as a man of breeding. This, however, Cunningham discounted during that first impression as being perhaps the natural expression of his army training. A man may carry himself with a certain air and yet be every inch a rascal, and Ned was determined to tear aside the mask which he felt convinced served as a polished veneer to a scarred interior.

His greeting was cold, yet there was no lack of civility. The Captain evidently expected this and passed it over lightly. He was deliberate as he laid down his hat and cane, and drew his chair closer to where Cunningham sat in front of a large table, covered with legal documents.

"I appreciate your courtesy in seeing me after the unfortunate misunderstanding of last evening," Auchester began.

"Was there any misunderstanding?" Cunningham demanded bluntly. "The affair seemed to me to be only too clear."

"It is natural that you should put that interpretation upon it. The occasion of my call this morning is to place you in possession of the real facts."

"As I said last night, your explanations belong to Mr. Spencer rather than to me."

It was evident that the Captain's ideas on this point failed to coincide. "When the husband of the lady in question disregards his responsibilities and another man assumes them," he said with significant emphasis, "may I not conclude that the other man is at least interested in the real facts?"

"I have assumed no responsibilities beyond that of a friend," Cunningham insisted.

Auchester looked at him a moment deliberately, with

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a quiet smile. "You are a courageous man, Mr. Cunningham, or else singularly inexperienced with the world. I am at a loss to decide which."

"I do not flatter myself that you took the trouble to call upon me for the pleasure of exchanging personal impressions."

"No," the Captain admitted, brought by Cunningham's remark to his definite purpose; "I came to tell you that last evening I made Mrs. Spencer a definite offer of marriage."

Cunningham gazed at him incredulously. "In civilized countries like America we do not practise polyandry," he said dryly.

Auchester appeared not to notice the sarcasm. "Unfortunately I was laboring under a misapprehension as far as Mrs. Spencer is concerned," he continued.

"She felt that even one husband at a time was one too many, I imagine," Cunningham laughed. "Come, Auchester, I expected a better story from you than that!"

"Since circumstances seemed to place me in the wrong last evening, Mr. Cunningham, I refuse to take offense, but may I not ask that our conversation be treated with the seriousness which the occasion demands?"

There was a flash in the Captain's eye which Cunningham noted, and his tone contained a certain authority which compelled respect.

"I beg you to continue," Cunningham said quietly.

"I have been aware of the domestic infelicities of the Spencers," Auchester went on; "but the personal desire to take a part of them upon my own shoulders is of more recent date. My offer of marriage was made with a full knowledge of the circumstances, and with the utmost

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respect for Mrs. Spencer. One could scarcely entertain less than that toward the woman he wishes to make his wife, could he?"

"You will have to make it clearer still before I understand." Cunningham failed to follow him. "How can an offer of marriage be made to a woman already married without in itself being an affront?"

"I will answer your question by asking another. Does marriage in its true sense exist in cases like the Spencers'?"

"Why not?"

"Does the mere fact that a legal ceremony was performed sometime in the dim past justify the living together of a man and a woman who are no more to each other than utter strangers?"

"You have a large contract on your hands if you intend to remedy our existing marriage laws," Cunningham replied. "Is that your idea?"

"I have no interest in them whatever except as they affect me," Auchester explained. "In my opinion every one should settle this all-important matter for himself. My own country has laws even more cruel than yours, and in a question which so vitally affects me I decline to consider myself bound by them."

"Just what was your proposition to Mrs. Spencer, — if I may ask?"

"That she leave her husband and go with me out into the daylight. That if a divorce could be secured, we would then be married; if not, we would be law unto ourselves."

"Then you would think it wise to have a ceremony performed as soon as it could legally be done?"

"Certainly. I do not object to the law when it operates justly; it is the injustice which I would remedy."

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"A dangerous doctrine, Captain."

"I learned it as a soldier, Mr. Cunningham; there are times when martial law is imperative."

"It is less dangerous for the man than for the woman," Cunningham continued. "Had you thought of that?"

"Yes; and the condition can only exist where both have the same moral standard, — far higher, to my mind, than the conventional code."

"That was the misapprehension you were laboring under?"

"Yes. Mrs. Spencer appeared to have the same disregard for conventions which I have; as a matter of fact she only thinks she disregards them: they are as fearsome to her as to others. Then again, I believed that she reciprocated my affection. In this I was also wrong."

"All this developed during your dinner at 'Spicer's'?"

"Yes; your coming had no bearing whatever upon the situation. Mrs. Spencer had made her position quite clear, and I had told her that as long as she held to it I was bound to respect her feelings. She, at all events, fully realizes that nothing I said was spoken in other than the deepest honor which a man may show a woman. We were about to leave when we ran into some people whom she did not care to meet. Then you came in, and from that point you know more than I."

There was a long silence between the two men after Auchester ceased speaking. Every word the Captain uttered conveyed an impression of manly sincerity, and during the interview Cunningham's attitude toward him underwent a complete change. He was dangerous still, but only because of his inherent qualities of upright man-

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hood, which stood out clearly even though his code of life differed so widely from his listener's and from that of the world at large. Cunningham's only wonder now was that Lucy had been able to resist him at all.

"May I ask who you are?" Cunningham said abruptly, breaking the silence.

"Lord Annersley, of Annersley Manor, Devonshire."

"And why are you here *incog*?"

"Auchester was my name before I succeeded to my brother's title," he explained. "I am in Boston on confidential business for the house of Bennett Brothers, and we don't usually mix business and titles. I have a dozen letters of introduction, but I have chosen to win my friends myself, which has left me less restricted in my personal affairs."

"Since last evening, then, you have abandoned your intentions regarding Mrs. Spencer?" Cunningham returned to the earlier portion of the conversation.

"No," was the frank response. "I have never yet abandoned anything which I undertook; but sometimes I have had to wait."

"Surely your family would not receive her under the circumstances you suggest?"

"My plan was to live in Italy until the divorce could be secured. After that — I am the head of my family."

"How is it that you, an officer in the British Army, are so indifferent to conventions? I had supposed that unless a soldier rigidly observed them he got plenty of service but little social recognition."

"You are entirely right, Mr. Cunningham. It has been service that I have always sought. It is, perhaps, natural that every man should seek that which he lacks."

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Cunningham required no credentials to know that Auchester belonged to the aristocracy. The quiet yet forceful dignity of his manner, the flash in his eye when he demanded a hearing, the masterly note in his voice as he spoke these last words, — all marked him as a man who knew himself to be secure in his position.

“Then, as I understand it, you would still take Mrs. Spencer with you to Europe if she would go.”

“Only when convinced upon the two points I mention,” Auchester corrected. “A woman whom conventions can terrify would be utterly wretched under unconventional conditions, and unless her affection centered wholly in me it would be merely exchanging one impossible situation for another.”

“Auchester,” said Cunningham bluntly, holding out his hand, “I’ve done you an injustice and I’m sorry for it. Personally, I don’t agree with you at all, but you have as much right to your opinion as I have to mine, — especially since you recognize the importance of respecting the ideas of others, as you have done with Mrs. Spencer. But, frankly, if you continue to live up to your present position, I don’t believe you will succeed in this undertaking. Mrs. Spencer is a woman, and being a woman she is dependent upon conventions whether she thinks so or not. What you have already told me bears out my statement. A man can afford to be more independent of them. Look back over similar cases you have known or read about: how many of the women have been happy? No, Auchester, say what you will, we men can’t put ourselves in woman’s place, and such retribution as may come as a result of breaking society’s laws falls on her far more heavily than it does on us.”

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"I thank you for hearing me through so patiently," Auchester said, rising to go.

"I'm obliged to you for coming," Cunningham replied, shaking his hand cordially. "If you will forgive my early prejudice, I hope I may see more of you."

"It would be a pleasure to me," the Captain responded, bowing. "Until then — good morning."

Cunningham was full of the affair when he returned home that evening, and went at once to Margaret's room, wondering that she was not at the door as usual to greet him. He found her sitting in a chair by the window with a book in her lap, but judging by the small number of leaves turned she had either just sat down or had made little progress. He saw from her face as she looked up that she was worried, and he hastened forward.

"What's the matter, Peggy?" he asked with solicitude. "Aren't you feeling well?"

"Draw up a chair, Ned," she replied, leaving his questions unanswered. "Something serious has happened, and I must know more about it."

Anxious lines came in Cunningham's face as he sat down near her. "Don't keep me in suspense," he urged.

"Is it true that you were motoring with Lucy last evening?"

"Is that all!" he exclaimed with relief. "If that is the trouble I can brush it away like a straw."

Then he rehearsed the events of the previous evening from the time Susette had telephoned until he had returned Lucy to her home, and from this point he continued what he considered the amazing story of Auchester. Margaret listened attentively until he had finished.

"There, — that straightens that all out, doesn't it?"

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he asked confidently. "Aren't you ashamed to have let it worry you even for a moment?"

"No, Ned; it doesn't straighten things out at all. You have committed a grave indiscretion, — as grave as any you have cautioned Lucy against; and I tremble for the possible consequences."

"Nonsense," he replied half-impatiently; "I thought she was trapped there with Auchester, and I did only what any friend would have done under the circumstances."

"You consider that you owed that to Lucy as a friend?"

"Of course."

"Then what do you owe me, Ned, as your wife? Have you a right to risk your reputation in the community and my happiness in order to rescue some other woman from a fancied danger?"

"What possible risk could there be to you or to me?" he demanded incredulously. "As the affair turned out there was no risk to any one."

"If you can't see it yourself then I must see it for you." It was the first time that Margaret had ever reproved him. "No man can be mixed up in an affair like this without having it reflect on him, and if the man happens to be married then his wife must suffer with him. We can't tell yet how much this may amount to, but there is enough in it to raise a wretched scandal."

Cunningham was forced to accept the seriousness of the situation by Margaret's all too evident anxiety. "I can't believe it, Peggy," he said, "but it's enough that you feel as you do about it. What has brought it all up?"

She handed him a letter which had been delivered to her by messenger.

"Shall I read it?" he asked.

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He took the letter from the envelope as she nodded, and read:

DEAR MRS. CUNNINGHAM: *Ned and Lucy were motoring last evening until one o'clock. You may have no objections, but I have. Until now I have not taken exceptions to their intimacy because of the friendship between the families, but the limit has been reached. I trust that I may not have to take further action.* — VALENTINE SPENCER.

"The insulting little whelp!" Cunningham exclaimed indignantly. "I'll make him eat every word of that!"

"That would hardly improve matters," Margaret replied. "He is in a position where he can make things uncomfortable for all concerned. The question is whether or not he will."

"He wouldn't dare! You see from what I've told you how absolutely unfounded the whole story is."

Margaret's eyes fell and she sighed deeply. When she looked up again they were filled with tears. "Oh, my husband," she said, the words coming straight from her heart, "what can I say to open your eyes to the fact that a knowledge of your profession is not everything? What will make you understand that you are no more privileged to defy conventions than this foolish girl who seems determined to bruise her head against the wall? It is not enough that I understand, for the world chooses always to accept the worst. I begged you to go no further in your platonic protectorship, I warned you of the dangers, but you brushed everything one side, and now we are face to face with the fact itself. You say that the whole story is unfounded: is it? Mr. Spencer evidently doesn't know it all yet, and it is just as well that he doesn't. You were

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seen alone with Lucy at midnight at a public roadhouse, you went off together in your motor, — is there any lawyer who need ask a better case of circumstantial evidence than that?"

Cunningham bowed his head. "Yes," he acknowledged, "you are right, — as you always are. I've been a fool, but I can't believe that anything uncomfortable will come of it. What concerns me most is that you have been made unhappy. A world full of Lucys and their troubles isn't worth a moment's anxiety to you, dear. You believe me, don't you, Peggy?"

"Of course," she answered; "that doesn't enter into the question at all. But you are so upright and strong and brave that you don't realize how rotten the world is around you. Suspicion loves a shining mark, and your reputation means so much to us both that you must not take such awful risks."

He reached over and took her hand, pressing it to his lips. "Peggy dear," he said, "a man's knowledge is pitifully weak compared with a woman's intuition. I am still confident that nothing will come of this, but that doesn't alter the fact that you are right. Forgive me, and believe me when I say that I shall do my best to practise what I preach."

THE letter which Spencer sent to Margaret was but a partial outlet of a spirit outraged almost to the point of explosion. Importuned by his creditors, harassed by financial demands from a quarter which at all costs must be kept in the background, balked by Lucy in his expectations to secure sums sufficient to relieve the strain, — it was more than his nature could endure to be finally ignored by his wife and, as he expressed it, bully-ragged by Cunningham. Such self-respect as he possessed demanded that something be done, and the first thing which suggested relief to his offended mind was to write Margaret. He really had little idea that the letter would even cause annoyance, but, after the few moments' conversation he had enjoyed with her, it occurred to him that perhaps she might read between the lines what a deeply injured man he was, and at least be sympathetic. Toward Cunningham he now entertained the deepest resentment, but the encounter on the piazza showed him that upon anything like equal terms he was certain to be worsted. The lawyer's trained mind, always in readiness for action, was too great a handicap to overcome; and after his recent experiences Spencer did not relish further humiliation.

It was while in this uncomfortable state of unrest that the first definite rumors of the affair at "Spicer's" reached

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his ears. When he greeted Lucy and Cunningham so savagely upon their return it had not seriously occurred to him that he had other than general grounds for complaint, and his attitude was simply an expression of ordinary ill-humor. Cunningham's position in the community, his congenial home life, his character and bearing as a man, — all removed him in Spencer's mind from that class of men whose names could ever be associated with anything not wholly honorable. In fact this was Vallie's chief grudge against him. He knew that Lucy had often measured them up against each other, and he had no doubt that her present attitude was either due to Cunningham's advice or a direct result of the unequal comparison. So, when rumor said that Lucy had dined with him in a private room at "Spicer's," and Spencer found that people other than himself were commenting upon the fact, he saw in it all only an opportunity to make Lucy uncomfortable and possibly to reach Cunningham through her. In the light of later developments he regretted that the letter had been sent to Margaret so prematurely: it would make far better reading now.

Lucy had been fairly successful in avoiding him since the evening in question, but a house has only four walls, and there is a limited number of exits and entrances which may be used with self-respect. In her own mind she had no reason for keeping apart from him except the fact that even the sight of him caused an inward resentment which made her almost ill. Still, when the moment came for him to make the issue he had determined upon, he knew he would have no difficulty in finding the opportunity.

The looms in Lucy's mill of life were weaving fast, but the patterns were ludicrously grotesque. The long stretch

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of gay colors had yielded to somber shades of drab; then, as suddenly, they shifted to a bright variation, only to change again to neutral tones; but the colorless drab shades did not return. The effect of the brief exhilaration still remained, tempered now by the sober reality which later developments had brought. Her old friends still stood by her, and Cunningham, even though he offended, had evidenced his friendliness. All this encouraged her, and the seriousness which came as a reaction proved agreeable rather than otherwise. During the days which followed the tempestuous home-coming, a calm had entered into her life which she did not analyze, but which brought with it a strange relief. It was good to be liked, as the men showed so plainly they did like her; it was good to be scolded by so dear a friend as Ned whether she deserved it or not. And beyond all this she was buoyed up by the unexpected experience with Auchester. With her eyes closed she could still see the straight, stalwart figure standing before her; beyond all other sounds she could hear the declaration of his love and the brave, manly defense of his position; more penetrating than any sensation she had ever experienced she could feel the pressure of his lips against her own. She had not even yet asked herself if she loved him; it was enough to know that she was loved.

This afternoon she wandered off the piazza, down into a shady portion of the garden, finding there an intangible reminder of a red-letter day. Sitting beneath the great overspreading oak, she read and thought, unconscious of the passing time or that she was alone. At length a shout of childish voices roused her from the reverie as Larry and Babs bounded into view, the advance guard of Susette and the supper tray. When they discovered that

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their rendezvous was already occupied, all three came to an abrupt halt.

"Pardon, madame," Susette apologized; "I will take the children to the piazza."

"No," Lucy said quickly; "we will all have supper together, right here."

"Hurrah!" Larry cried impulsively, but still somewhat incredulously; "you will eat supper with us?"

"Yes," she smiled, holding out her arms; "mother is oh! so hungry! Will you see that she gets enough?"

"I will," the diminutive Babs assured her, as both children came forward. "If there isn't enough, Larry may go without."

Susette spread the little table, unloading the tray while the eyes of her charges watched every movement.

"You may have my strawberry jam," Larry announced generously.

"Humph!" exclaimed Babs, "that's nothing, — you know you don't like jam."

"Yes, I do," he faltered; "only I'm sick of it."

"There isn't any plate for mother," Larry continued, quite willing to turn the conversation, "nor any spoon nor any napkin."

"I'll get them," Susette said, starting for the house.

"No; Larry and Babs must feed mother," Lucy urged; "it will taste much better."

So the supper proceeded, — supper for the children, play for the mother-heart which warmed under the unusual experience. Babs was the dignified member of the party, correcting the table manners of the others and completely living up to her self-assumed responsibility. Then, with the creature-necessities provided for, the animal instinct for play became assertive. As Susette

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cleared away the relics of the repast, Larry turned to his mother.

"Come on down to the beach," he invited hesitatingly.

"Oh, please!" Babs echoed, seizing Lucy's hand.

From force of habit she started to make some excuse, but for the first time in her life a sudden desire to be with them took possession of her. Why not? With the quickness of childhood to sense unspoken thoughts, Babs tugged at her hand and Lucy rose to her feet. "Why not?" she said to herself. To little Babs she answered, "Will you teach mother all your games?"

"Mother's coming! mother's coming!" cried the delighted Babs, releasing the hand and dancing about for joy.

"Susette," Larry shouted to the returning figure, "mother's going down on the beach with us!"

Babs again took Lucy's hand and slyly kissed it. Why was it that the touch of those baby lips went straight to Lucy's heart, causing her to sink upon the grass and press the little figure to her breast? There are more strange changes in the chemistry of the spirit than can be found within the laboratory of the scientist. Else why should the joy-tears in Lucy's eyes transform her in that instant from the moth fluttering about the flame of life into a woman capable of being a part of life itself? Excuse herself from responding to that appeal! No power on earth could have prevented her at that moment from embracing the opportunity.

As Lucy had said, her summer had been a long succession of waves, and whenever she found herself carried to the heights on the crest of one, she knew that another was only awaiting its opportunity to dash away the insecure foundation upon which she rested, and to swamp her in

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its undertow. It had happened so often now that she came to look for it; so when, after her play with the children, she found that Vallie had returned home, she simply sighed wearily and wondered what particular form his generally disagreeable mood would take.

The time had passed for dissembling, and neither one made any effort to converse during the trying period of dinner. Lucy's pride prevented her from openly avoiding him, for she felt that this action would in some way be a tacit admission that she had something to conceal; but at the earliest possible moment she silently rose from the table and started to leave the room.

"Where are you going?" Spencer demanded. "I have something I want to say to you."

"Down on the beach," she replied, moving toward the piazza.

"I'd rather talk to you up here."

"You'll find me on the beach," she said firmly, without pausing.

Spencer followed closely behind as she passed through the garden and down the ivy-grown stone steps leading to the little sandy beach below. Something drew her back to the scene of her afternoon's experience, something in that experience seemed to promise her protection. She proceeded as if unconscious of her husband's proximity, while he, angered still further by her apparent indifference, fumed disagreeably in her wake. Once on the beach she stood still and looked out across the water. The red moon was just rising above the horizon line, the sky had not yet lost the last reflections from the sunken sun, a faint breeze cooled the atmosphere, but was not enough to make impression upon the surface of the sea, which beat gently and peacefully with mathematical rhythm

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upon the shore. What right had discordant elements to enter here? Lucy's heart cried out against it, — why should not Nature, at peace with itself, rise up to prevent such sacrilegious human intrusion?

Then she turned to the trailer behind her. "There's a rock over here where I may sit," she said with a total lack of feeling in her voice. "Your conversations are such that I enjoy them better sitting down. What is it this time, — the odious money question again?"

"No; I've given that up —"

"You might as well," she interrupted; "there's nothing more to say concerning that."

"I want to know about you and Cunningham at 'Spicer's' last week," he said bluntly.

Lucy looked at him curiously. This was a new variety after all. The tone in his voice was actually demanding, which he had never before employed in asking explanations of her actions. "Didn't Ned tell you all you wanted to know the other evening?"

"He told me nothing about 'Spicer's'; I supposed you had simply been motoring with him."

"I'm sorry he didn't chart out the course the car took, if that is what you wish. I'm afraid I can't do it."

"Then you admit that you were there with him?"

"Oh, dear no! I haven't admitted anything."

"Do you deny that you and he dined there, in a private room, and were together alone until one o'clock in the morning?"

"Absolutely. What an absurd idea!" she laughed.

"But I tell you that you did," Spencer insisted. "I can produce witnesses, and I intend to push this thing to the limit."

"What do you call 'the limit,' Vallie?"

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"The divorce court."

Lucy clapped her hands. "Will you really let me get a divorce?" she cried. "Will you fix things so that I need never see your wretched little self again?"

Spencer was not looking for this response. "So that is what you want, is it?"

"Nothing so much. Will you do it?"

"What good will that do, — you can't marry Cunningham."

"Of course I can't; but at least I can be rid of you."

"Unless Cunningham's wife divorces him," Spencer continued; "that would fix it up for you."

"Why should Margaret do that, — even to please me?"

Spencer laughed at her apparent innocence. "Most women object to living with a man after he's been shown up with another woman in the divorce court."

"But Ned has nothing to do with our affair." Lucy was still puzzled.

"Oh, hasn't he?" Spencer replied. "I intend to name him as correspondent."

Her face sobered for an instant, and then she laughed outright. "I didn't know you had so much humor, Vallie. The idea of Ned Cunningham, dear, upright, puritanical Ned, who doesn't know the world contains any other woman besides Margaret, being named as a correspondent! It's a joke!"

"It may not strike him the same way."

"Surely you don't mean it?"

"If you have any doubts, you have only to wait and see."

For the first time Lucy realized that Spencer was in earnest, and that it was necessary for her to explain enough to exonerate Ned. "But I did not dine with him that

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evening," she repeated firmly, "I did not see him until just before I left, and he simply brought me home in his car."

"Tell that to the marines," Spencer retorted.

"But it's the truth."

"You didn't dine there alone, did you?"

"No; but it was not with Ned."

She waited a moment for him to question her, but he was silent.

"Do you want to know who it was?" she asked, frightened by even the thought that Cunningham should in some way be involved.

Spencer bent over until his face was near hers, and his ferret-eyes snapped as they looked into hers. "No," he replied shortly; "it is enough for me that Cunningham was there; he's the man I want to get, and I'll give him a chance to explain in court. You'll get what you want, which is a separation from me, and I'll get Cunningham. It will make fine headlines in the papers: the great publicist, the famous lawyer, the upright citizen, the irreproachable husband, caught alone with a married woman at 'Spicer's' at midnight! Damme, I don't care whether you dined together or not: I can prove that you were there with him, and I'm content to let imagination and the yellow journals do the rest. They're even talking seriously about him for United States Senator. Bah! I'll show him up as a whitened sepulcher! I told him that the worm would turn, and now, by Gad, he may behold the 'metamorphosis.'"

Lucy's cheeks blanched as Spencer ran on and the realization clearly came to her that the situation could be construed exactly as he put it. She had boasted that her indiscretions were of such a nature that they could

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injure no one but herself; now she saw how far-sighted Cunningham's contention was that her confidence in this was unwarranted. As she knew Vallie now he was quite capable of carrying out his threat, and the malignant gleam in his eye showed that he would take no little delight in the undertaking.

"You are contemptible enough to admit that you don't care whether your charge is true or not? That all you want is to smear his good name with some of the filth from your own mind?"

"Oh, there's no question in my mind that he's the man all right," Spencer protested.

"You lie, Vallie, and you know it! You know as well as I do that there's nothing in the whole affair except your own evil designs, whatever they may be. You know that Ned Cunningham is as far above any such thought as common decency is above you."

"Calling names and throwing mud won't help things a bit," he replied calmly. "It has been Ned this and Ned that ever since we came to Boston, and I'm sick to death even of his name. Now he has gone too far and so have you. I warned him the last time I saw him. Now I'll show you both that I mean business."

Lucy regarded him for a moment with a silence which was eloquent in expressing her feelings toward him. "What is the game, Vallie?" she demanded at length. "I think it will work out quicker if you take me into your confidence."

"Game?" he repeated as if reproaching her for so unworthy a suggestion. "There isn't any game. I'm simply protecting the sanctity of my home."

XXVI

IN reading the sensational records of *causes célèbres*, it is natural to assume that association with them in any capacity means constant dash and excitement and a freedom from the ordinary uneventful happenings of life. This, perhaps, is due to the fact that those who transcribe these annals do not consider the minor details of sufficient interest to the general reader to warrant their recording. Langdon could have borne testimony that it represented the apotheosis of tedium and fatigue.

The address which Cunningham gave him of the woman in the Montgomery case eliminated much of his preliminary work, and the detectives to whom she had been assigned performed such portion of the task as naturally belonged to them. Langdon's function was to follow up such clues as were supplied to him by others; and this undertaking he found filled with disappointments and exasperating delays. Cunningham had been quietly amused more times than he would allow Langdon to realize by the exclamations of disgust, despair, and dismay which the younger man made in discussing with him during the summer the progress he was making. Yet never once had there been a wavering in his purpose to secure every fact which could be elicited by force or chance from those whose interests lay in concealment or subter-

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fuge. He forswore invitations to summer gaieties which interfered with his investigations, and became almost unknown to his familiar haunts; so his self-effacement during these months was as complete as the disappearance of the famous Montgomery case from the scarelines of the daily press.

Still, in spite of all the disappointments, Langdon's work had not been without result. Montgomery had succeeded in keeping his identity to himself, even the name under which he was indicted being obviously an assumed one; and this was one point which the lawyer hoped to clear up. Brewster had been a local character, but no one who knew him had ever met Montgomery in his company. Several of these witnesses were given an opportunity, in one way or another, to identify the woman, but she proved equally mysterious. At best it could only be conjectured that the two unknowns were acquaintances of brief standing; and Langdon's theory became strengthened that the two had worked together in accomplishing perhaps the double crime of robbery and murder. The fact that no money was found on Montgomery's person proved nothing one way or the other since the presence of a third party was established, as this woman, if she be the one, could easily have taken the proceeds of their crime with her when she left the carriage.

Montgomery was a man of better breeding than he had been willing to disclose, and Langdon was convinced from what he had seen that his surly bearing was assumed and intended to deceive. Yet he was not prepared to find his supposed accomplice just the type of woman as was the one whom Cunningham had indicated. She was a dashing brunette, handsome in a way, living with her mother in a well-furnished apartment in the West End of Boston.

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She had her own motor and was a familiar figure at those functions to which admittance was gained without social credentials. Langdon could scarcely associate her with the man in Charles Street jail, nor with anything so desperate as the crime of which she stood suspected. Cunningham had not thought it necessary to give him all the details which had brought her within the pale of suspicion; but such of the lawyer's doubts as at first existed disappeared as his investigations proceeded. It was a shock for him to find that the mild-faced old "mother" was evidently hired to give respectability to the apartment, and that the motor car and the marvelous gowns might be accounted for by the fact that their possessor was evidently living along the "easiest way." This last discovery weakened Langdon's theory that she was expending the proceeds of the crime, and caused other complications in his mind when he discovered through the detectives the identity of the man. This latest information, indeed, was of so personal a nature that, as it had no possible bearing upon the case, he hesitated to pass it along to Cunningham. He considered it as one of those secrets which professional men are bound in honor to protect; yet he was entitled to his own indignation.

The evidence collected by the detectives was fairly conclusive as to the woman's earlier association with Montgomery, but it lacked absolute corroboration. To strengthen his own convictions, Langdon secured a snapshot picture showing her stepping into her car. Armed with this, he sought another interview with Montgomery, in the course of which he suddenly held the picture before him.

"Did you ever know this woman?" he demanded abruptly.

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Montgomery's involuntary start and the expression in his eyes gave Langdon his answer, but in an instant the man recovered his composure and his lips denied what had already been acknowledged. "No," he answered in a tone more surly than ever; "what should I have to do with a woman like that?"

"That's curious," the lawyer continued. "There's some one here at the jail in whom she is interested, and I thought it might perhaps be you."

The man looked at him suspiciously, but Langdon could see that he was eager to hear more. "Why should she or any one else care what happens to me?" he said at length.

"I'm glad it's not you," Langdon went on, "for much as you dislike me, I'm really the best friend you have. The woman in that picture, pretty as she is, is nothing better than a beast, — she's a vampire."

Montgomery's hands clenched. "Well," he said, evidently holding himself in, "well, go on. How do you know so much about her?"

"She's mixed up with some one here in this jail, and they will arrest her presently. I'm relieved to know that you are not the man. She and this other person, whoever he is, did a job together, and she evidently got away with the plunder. Since then she's been blowing it in on herself, and has landed an easy mark who has set up a grand establishment for her. He gave her that car. Now she's afraid her pal, who hasn't come to trial yet, may get out and spoil her little game. Pretty tough on him, isn't it?"

Langdon watched him carefully as the story progressed, and felt certain that the breaking point was near at hand. "Yes," he continued, "vampire is the only name to give

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a woman like that. One can have a certain respect for those who go wrong when they remain loyal to their pals, but this one is evidently relieved to get rid of her late companion in crime, poor chap. After they get her I must find out who he is, for my sympathy is all with him. She can ride around in automobiles and wear fine clothes and have champagne suppers, leaving him to rot in jail for all she cares, by Gad! It's tough, I say."

Langdon rose to leave the cell.

"Let me see that picture again," Montgomery demanded, holding out his hand, but not meeting the lawyer's eyes. He took the photograph in his hand, and bending forward as he sat on the edge of his cot, he gazed at it for a long time.

"Handsome woman, isn't she?" Langdon ventured at length; "but you never can tell by the looks. Vampire, — that's what she is."

The lawyer was certain that the man would give way, and waited expectantly for the outburst of abuse which he felt sure would be heaped upon the head of the woman. Montgomery's superb control of himself was shaken, the twitching features and the clenched hands giving the only evidence of his mental struggle. Suddenly the storm broke, but it was of a nature so different from what Langdon had expected that he started forward in surprise. The man's head dropped upon his hands and his body swayed with convulsive grief.

When at length he raised his head he saw the surprised look in Langdon's eyes. "Let me keep this picture," he begged; "it reminds me of some one I used to know."

"Keep that picture of a vampire!" the lawyer cried.

"She may be what you call her," the man admitted,

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"but the one she reminds me of was an angel." He paused for a moment, ashamed of his emotion. "The woman she reminds me of," he repeated, "was one any man might be proud to acknowledge, and I'd be glad of a chance to go to hell for her. Tell her that if you ever see her."

There was no doubt as to the identification in spite of Montgomery's best efforts to conceal it, and after a consultation with Cunningham the evidence was placed in the hands of the District-Attorney, who issued a warrant for the woman's apprehension. The two lawyers were already in his office when she was brought in for examination, and Langdon passed through his first experience in the vituperative power of a woman's tongue. He recalled the name he had given her when talking with Montgomery and regretted that he had not employed a milder one, since its use had deprived him now of adequate description. Her vigorous denial was to be expected, her anger could be explained as the one resource left to prevent the facts from being known; but no one of those present could have foreseen her forensic ability. When anger and threats proved unavailing, she fell back upon her pride, and expressed her entire indifference to the fate which would overtake her persecutors as a result of the insult they had offered her. She had influential friends in the city who could vouch for her. She preferred not to pass through the humiliation of having them know of the predicament in which she found herself as a result of the criminal mistake these "gentlemen" had made, but if there was no alternative she would summon them to release her and to punish her offenders.

Cunningham did not appreciate as Langdon did that the outcome of all this would in all probability be far-

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reaching in a personal way. The older lawyer was studying the case entirely from a professional standpoint, considering the information which had come to him, and applying it from various points of view to the probable relation which the woman bore to the case itself. Possibly the facts would come out before the trial, but it was necessary to assume that the case must stand entirely upon circumstantial evidence; so it was all-important to gain as many first impressions as the opportunity would permit. It was not a woman under examination, as far as Cunningham was concerned: she was merely a factor in the case, and with his experience he was able to regard her with an impersonality which was denied to Langdon. The preliminary fireworks soon spent themselves, and the struggle resolved itself into a contest between a woman whose wits had been sharpened by experience and an inquisitor whose skill came from the practice of years. Back and forth the battle waged, anger thwarted by patience followed by threats made harmless by indifference, sarcasm meeting determination, tears falling upon a heart of stone. Then at length, with little progress made on either side, the contest ended and the moment which Langdon had dreaded arrived.

"You are free to summon any friends you may desire and to retain counsel," the District-Attorney repeated.

The woman drew herself up to her full stature, disdain replacing the other emotions which her face had shown. "I will write a note which I will ask you to have delivered."

When the envelope was placed in the hands of the District-Attorney she was taken into the detention room. After glancing at the name he handed it to Cunningham, and Langdon watched the effect. The note was addressed to Valentine Spencer. Cunningham glanced at the letter,

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gave it back to the District-Attorney, and left the office without comment. Langdon, following close behind, laid a hand upon his shoulder as they reached the street:

"It's going to be a miserable affair," he said.

"Poor little girl!" was the response. "He might at least have spared her this."

XXVII

THE new-born driving force which had been developing in Spencer all summer reached its culmination in his determination to carry his threat into execution. The evolution had been gradual, but it was now complete. Lucy's indifference and ridicule had broken the surface, so that her refusal to come to his assistance in his financial stress made the injury smart the more; Cunningham's patronizing acquaintanceship came to a climax with his insulting remarks when he brought Lucy home on that night which was now separated in Spencer's mind from all others. When he started in to express his individuality he had no notion that affairs would go so far. The idea of a divorce had not occurred to him until his wife pressed him for an explanation of what his words actually meant, and the reply slipped from his angry lips before he realized what he was saying. At first it seemed that he had made a fatal mistake, for the avidity with which she seized upon the suggestion of a separation showed that she was by no means averse to the proposition; but the deep concern she manifested when Cunningham's name was brought into the case showed that at last he had gained the whip-hand, and he proposed to enjoy the novel sensation to the utmost while it lasted.

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The effect which a divorce would have upon his own fortunes did not suggest itself until some hours after his determination was crystallized, but by that time he had become a hero to himself, and this was only another sacrifice which he must make for the great principle for which he stood. Fortunately no one pressed him for a definition of just what that principle was; it sufficed that it appeared great to him. At all events, being already hopelessly involved, his present step could place him in no worse predicament than that in which he now found himself. All else assumed a subordinate position to the satisfaction he felt in the opportunity he saw before him to wipe out the score which had been mounting up, and to show his wife and Cunningham that he was a real force too dangerous to be ignored.

Realizing the strength of his position, he was in no haste actually to start proceedings. Lucy's obvious contempt for him as they met in moving about the house concerned him little as against the new sensation he enjoyed of holding the upper hand. He could see that she was desperately in earnest, and that she was thinking out the whole situation with an intensity he had not known she possessed. He could afford to be patient and await the effect of his newly asserted manhood upon her. He watched her day by day, discovering in the process that the woman he knew now was vastly changed from the girl he had formerly known. Of course this was to be expected from her altered relations toward him, but he wondered at the interest which she now took in the life centering in and around the home. He noticed that she was with the children more than he had ever seen before, and it nettled him to see their intimacy and to contrast it with their evident efforts to avoid him. Now Lucy never

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thought of taking her afternoon motor ride without them, and supper under the trees was a common occurrence. The only smiles or bursts of laughter which came to Lucy's lips were when she joined with them in some of their childish games, in which she had by this time become proficient. But all signs of joy vanished summarily if he approached their vicinity, and some excuse was made to transfer the scene of their activity to a spot where they would be safer from unwelcome intrusion.

In the meantime, the chemistry of Lucy's spirit was undergoing still further changes, but the crystals it deposited were larger and of more enduring quality than before. Since the moment when realization came to her of the awful possibilities which the present situation contained, she had reviewed in her mind the entire history of her life from the time when she could first recall anything; and the pitiless clearness with which one views weaknesses and failures when once the power is given to pull aside the kindly concealing veil, struck her with terrific force. Strangely enough, there was still none of the old depression in the sensation she experienced; on the contrary, she felt herself to be keyed up to intensest pitch, and filled with a desire to make some sacrifice which should atone for the long years of selfishness and the blind, self-centered pride. Never in her life had she denied herself for another's happiness; never had it occurred to her that she was responsible to any one except herself in her every-day expression. Now, when perhaps it was too late, an understanding came of experiences and conversations which had conveyed only superficial messages; now, when the opportunity was perhaps denied, came a desire for atonement which contained a strange element of joy.

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And through it all with constant recurrence came the memory of her red-letter afternoon with the two children. The happy note in Larry's voice as he called out to Susette sounded in her ears, and the pressure of Babs' little lips upon her hand, the first voluntary expression of affection the child had ever given, burned its way with life-giving warmth into the very depths of her heart. She could atone to them; at least it was not too late for that. The thought of the children reminded her of Cunningham: "See how quickly your life will respond to that love which they will give back to you, see how the little fingers will twine around your heart-strings, and see how much strength those tiny hands possess to help you bear the disappointments which are bound to come."

What a man Ned was to foresee that this moment would actually arrive, — what friends he and Margaret had been in trying to show her the way to make something out of her useless, unworthy self! Now, through her blindness and indifference to their counsels, she had placed him in jeopardy of becoming hopelessly compromised. It must not be, Lucy kept repeating to herself, — it should not be!

So at length she sought an interview which Spencer magnanimously granted. It pleased him beyond measure to have her come to him, and his important manner would have attracted his wife's attention and comment except for the anxiety in her heart. It was not the time to notice personalities or moods. She felt the responsibility of a man's reputation resting upon her head, and for days she had pondered the situation, striving to determine upon the best method of solution and the one most likely to succeed. Vallie needed money, and the thought came to her that if she could not persuade perhaps she could buy

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him off. She knew that in such a case the price would be a heavy one, but she was ready for the sacrifice. She was tired of the long struggle and the hopeless uncertainty. What did it matter if she did give up more than she ought? The money meant much less to her than peace and the comfort of knowing beyond a question of doubt that her foolishness had not reacted upon another. She had always used it to buy what she wanted; now she wanted just one thing in the world, and she could afford to be extravagant.

"Suppose we go down on the beach," Spencer suggested in acquiescing to her request.

Wondering why he should so express his preference, but indifferent to details, Lucy followed him as he desired. When they came to the foot of the steps he turned.

"There's a rock over here where I may sit," he said, mocking as closely as he could her words of a few days back. "I presume I shall enjoy your conversation better sitting down."

Lucy looked at him curiously, biting her lip to hold back the angry words which his insolence provoked. What a pitiful object he was in spite of the self-satisfied expression on his face! What a degradation to be obliged to trade or to plead with such a man as he! In that moment, while she struggled to remain calm, she wondered that she could now hold so cheap the man whom she had once accepted as her husband, and through habit at least had learned to regard as a part of her life. She wondered too that her concern for the outcome of this interview was for Cunningham and Margaret and the children rather than for herself. Even the personal agonies of the courtroom, called into being by Vallie's threat, had sunk into insignificance while her greater responsibilities oppressed her. Would he fall in with the suggestion she was about

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to make, or was his desire for retaliation so strong that it overshadowed even his own self-interest?

Spencer seated himself casually, crossing his legs and assuming an air of complete indifference. "I don't know just why I'm here," he said, "but I presume you will make that point clear to me."

"I want to ask you what the real reason is for your determination to make trouble for Ned. I can understand your desire to humiliate me."

"As I told you," he replied grandly, "my only intention is to protect the sanctity of my home."

"Let's cut out the fireworks, Vallie," she urged. "This isn't a cheap melodrama. What has Ned ever done to make you so vindictive?"

"Isn't this affair with you enough?"

"You know that there was no 'affair,' and that you are only making that a pretext. What is the real reason? Or is it simply because I won't agree to give you the money?"

"You don't suppose that any such sordid question as money enters into this?" he demanded theatrically.

"Yes; that is exactly what I think as far as your threat to me is concerned, but I can't understand why you drag him in. Is it to hurt me through him, or is there some reason why you are unwilling to learn the real facts?"

"You want the divorce, don't you?"

"Yes; but not at the price you name. I insist upon a separation, for I hate myself every moment we remain under the same roof; but I care little whether or not there is a divorce."

"Why are you so devilish anxious to protect Cunningham?" he demanded pointedly.

"Because there are not the slightest grounds for your charge, and your threat is intended merely to hurt him."

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"You say you took dinner there with a man, but not with Cunningham?"

"Yes."

"In a private room?"

"Yes. I don't care how much you compromise me, if you'll only leave Ned out of it."

"How about compromising the other man?"

"I shouldn't hesitate a moment," Lucy replied unexpectedly, rising eagerly to the suggestion.

"You don't care how much his reputation is hurt?"

"I could make it up to him."

"How?"

"By marrying him."

"Then there is some one you are in love with?" Spencer's eyes gleamed maliciously as he continued his cross-examination.

"No, Vallie; there isn't any one in the world I love; but for pity's sake tell me that you'll leave Ned alone. Go ahead, if you choose, and drag me into court. Drag this man in too, — I'll tell you who he is. We were there together, but that is the worst which even the world can say of us. Tell the open-mouthed hangers-on in the courtroom what you think your wife and the mother of your children is, — no one else will believe it. Do anything and everything which you can to hurt me, and take such revenge as you like for the pity and contempt in which I hold you; but be sufficiently honest with yourself, even in the wretched work you've undertaken, to vent your spleen upon those who are really guilty — of having passed an agreeable evening together."

Spencer enjoyed posing in a judicial rôle. The appeal did not affect him in the least, but it interested him tremendously. If he could only succeed in getting Cunning-

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ham in a position where he too would cry for mercy he might find enough satisfaction to warrant some sort of a final compromise which would show his real magnanimity! But until that time came he would remain as hard as adamant.

"This is a pretty story for a husband to listen to," he responded to Lucy's impassioned words. "A wife tries to shield her real lover by throwing the blame upon another man, and will make it up to the other man by marrying him —"

"You shall not insult me so!" she cried, her face deathly pale.

"I'm only repeating your own story," he said calmly. "Because you have handled the purse-strings you have assumed that your husband is of no consequence, and that you can do as you please. I have been indulgent and patient with you, but this time you have gone too far."

"Will you leave Ned out of it?" she demanded.

"No," he replied. "You have not deceived me by your efforts to shield him. Your anxiety for him and your disregard of this other alleged man is evidence enough that Cunningham is the one you were with. Nothing you have said has shaken my intentions to proceed as I originally intended. Shall we consider our interview at an end?"

"Very well," Lucy said, the pathetic note in her voice becoming hard and bitter; "then suppose we put it on a business basis: you need money and I have it. Any one who will do what you have already done will not have his sensibilities shocked by receiving a commercial proposition. What is your price? On what terms will you agree to leave Ned's name out of the consideration?"

The gleam in Spencer's eyes became keener. He had

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expected that this moment would come, and he knew that it would be a moment of temptation; but to yield would give Lucy too much satisfaction, and Cunningham would never know that the worm had turned. Again he was a martyr to a principle, and he felt it to be vastly to his credit that he placed his personal advantage behind him.

"This is not a matter which money can settle," he said with a well-assumed air of indignation. "The fact that you do not realize it shows how little you understand me, and the proposition itself is conclusive evidence that Cunningham is the man with whom I am to deal."

XXVIII

LUCY was not deceived by the mock-heroic attitude Spencer assumed throughout the interview, but she became finally convinced that he was determined to gratify his spirit of retaliation at the expense of all else. Up to this time her anxiety had been tempered by a hopefulness that his underlying motive was to frighten her enough to force her to yield to the demand which she had previously refused. Now it was evident that his intentions were far more hostile, and the anxiety which had oppressed her became aggravated into a terror which overwhelmed.

The whole affair was so involved that Lucy felt the impossibility of proceeding further without a helping hand to guide and a sympathetic mind to advise, so she naturally turned to Amsden. Nothing she had ever done so pleased the old man, for it gave him a reasonable excuse to forget his professional relations to her and to the estate, and to extend that affectionate assistance he would rather give. He felt her to be the only remaining tie binding him to the past, which had really been his life. One by one the old friends had passed away, and Amsden had not realized the importance of forming new associations until too late. Now that the generation of which he was a part had served its turn and given way to its successor, he

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found himself left almost wholly to the companionship of his books and to the enjoyment alone of those forms of recreation which had once included friends dear and sustaining.

Of these, Lucy's father had been the nearest. They had been boys together, and Amsden's early admiration for the daring courage always exhibited by his companion remained steadfast throughout the various stages which culminated in the brilliant business success this same characteristic compelled when applied to sterner pursuits. When Lucy's mother died, Amsden was as much shocked by the rude awakening from the assumption that nothing could go against his friend as he was by the grim fact of death itself. He threw himself into the void thus left in the life of the bereft man as fully as the distance between the two cities would permit, coming to consider himself, in the process, as Lucy's second father, and fully warranted in criticizing his friend for the surfeit of indulgence amidst which the child grew up. His position in this instance was characteristic of all others: he was second father to everything. Triumphs never came to him, but he could enjoy those of others; he remained unmarried, but the family of his friend was as great a responsibility as if it had been his own; he was wise and resourceful in advancing the projects of his clients and in protecting their interests, but it never occurred to him to apply these same instincts to the advancement of himself.

In Lucy, as she grew up, he found the prototype of his old friend, but lacking the balance which had made those characteristics practical. She possessed the same high-strung disposition, the same disregard of dangers which threatened to engulf, the same lovable personality which invited indulgence rather than censure; but the tempering

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qualities which experience had taught the father were yet to be acquired. The affection which Amsden entertained for his boyhood companion, when it could no longer be given to its object, centered itself upon the daughter; but of this Lucy had not the least suspicion. Times without number, during the term of his trusteeship, his heart had gone out to her with a longing for expression, but he sternly repressed himself, remaining always the retainer rather than the friend.

Amsden's disapproval of Spencer dated back to the time when he first heard that Lucy wanted to marry him, or thought she wanted to, which amounted to the same thing. It was instinctive rather than based upon anything tangible, but it was sufficiently real to him to warrant the expression of his misgivings to his friend. Lucy's father chided him playfully for his prejudice, and swept the objections one side, as he always did when his mind was once made up. Valentine was only half-baked as yet, he explained, but he was young and would outgrow it. No young man ever measured up to a parent's ideal, but as boys went he thought Spencer was as promising as any of them. It is all a lottery: one has to figure it out as carefully as he can, and then trust to luck that the result will justify the judgment. Lucy apparently wanted him, and anything which Lucy wanted she should have.

The removal of the Spencers from New York to Boston came shortly after the death of Lucy's father, and Amsden's appointment as trustee gave him a real pleasure in being able to serve one he loved for the sake of one he had loved; yet until now their relations had been purely perfunctory. At last the moment had come when she needed him, and he felt his heart beat faster with a touch of the old-time enthusiasm when he responded to her call.

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The first interview was in his office, and he listened to the story with no comments, but with occasional words of sympathy or encouragement. He knew that at worst she had been but foolish and ill-advised, yet he saw even more clearly than she that circumstances were more than unkind in arraying themselves against her. He did not say so, but his belief was strong that Spencer's threat was made definitely to influence the financial situation, and that his refusal to accept his wife's proposition was merely to strengthen his position in that Lucy would urge it more strongly upon him. It was not a graceful act for any man to allow himself to be bought off, and Amsden credited Vallie with about as much self-respect as this.

The old man would not have tamely submitted to what seemed to him disreputable means to an equally contemptible end except for the fact that Lucy had made quite clear to him, by her attitude rather than by her words, that she regarded the giving up of her property not merely as the only method she saw of protecting Cunningham's reputation, but also as an act of expiation for the follies she had committed. This, the old man realized, was the experience which her character had lacked in measuring it up against her father's. The interview had drawn them wonderfully close together, she finding comfort and relief in his understanding sympathy; he tasting the joy of a parent's heart in being able to give that relief.

"Remember," she repeated to him, "I am ready to pay a very great price to protect the good name of one whose only thought has been to protect mine. I have done wrong in placing myself in a position which could be misconstrued, and if I can bear the penalty alone that is all I ask. I am ready to sacrifice all my property and pass the rest of my life in poverty and want if that is necessary."

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"I am sure that no such sacrifices will be required," he reassured her, gently pressing the hand which rested confidently within his own; "but I understand."

"I deserve to be punished," she continued contritely; "but Ned only did what he believed to be his duty, — and it was for Vallie that he did it as well as for me."

For a long time they sat there in silence, the old man content that at least he had calmed her present fears, Lucy still unable to recall her mind in its rapid workings from the events which crowded so fast each upon the other. Strangely enough, the word "duty" she had just used in speaking of Cunningham came back to her again as it had come before, but it did not seem so hideous to her as once it did. Now it appeared as an expression of friendship, which had been unselfishly exercised with no thought of the consequences which were so soon to follow; now it seemed to call out to her for action equally unselfish, and she felt herself moving forward to meet it. "No monument was ever reared for what a man received, but for what he gave of himself," she remembered once hearing Cunningham say. How much more it meant to her now than when she had heard it! She must give now, or life would continue to be the same meaningless existence as before; and the determination which was born in the dread and apprehension of that hour in Amsden's office gave her courage to go back into her old surroundings with a confidence that he would show her how to prove herself equal to her opportunity.

At the lawyer's suggestion, the second interview took place at Lucy's home, and Spencer was also present. When he learned that the matter had been placed in Amsden's hands Vallie's first sensation was that Lucy had taken advantage of him, but his later conclusions exonerated her

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from the earlier blame. At last he was being taken seriously! He was well acquainted with "Poppy" Amsden's wholesome disapproval of him and his ways, and he still held him largely responsible for the tightening of the purse-strings just at the time when it affected him the most. In his present mood it would be a real pleasure to have the old man join with Lucy in her supplications, and when he succeeded in adding Cunningham to the suplicants his satisfaction would be complete.

By this time Spencer's plight did not seem so desperate as at first. As the affair progressed he was convinced that by the exercise of his manhood he had succeeded in rescuing himself from oblivion and financial mortification. He had been wise to refuse Lucy's suggestion when she first made it, but it was not too late to reconsider after he had impressed upon them all the fact that he was a man to be reckoned with, and that his final yielding to their importunities would be an act of supreme generosity rather than a sordid business transaction, as Lucy would be glad to make it out. It was painfully ridiculous, of course, to be obliged to provide against misunderstanding, but Amsden and Cunningham were men who would be only too ready to attribute sinister motives to anything he did. The property in question had been shared by Lucy and himself ever since their marriage, and while technically it stood in his wife's name, it was only fair to consider that a common ownership existed. Lucy had never thought of it otherwise until this meddling lawyer had put it into her head, and now she had the audacity to propose to buy him off with money which really belonged as much to him as it did to her! It would be no more ridiculous, Spencer reasoned, for "Poppy" Amsden to brand him as a thief for taking a muffin from the break-

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fast table merely because Lucy happened to pay the household expenses! He was entitled to half the income, and except for the unwarranted interference he was certain that he could have got it. Now it became necessary to meet conspiracy to defraud him of his rights with cleverness and sagacity; but if he finally decided to accept pecuniary satisfaction, after having taught his persecutors their richly merited lesson, it would only be a diplomatic method of securing that which really belonged to him, after all. A step in this direction was to impress upon Amsden the real strength of his position, so his mature judgment told him that the interview Lucy suggested could not be otherwise than favorable to his cause.

When Spencer last talked with Amsden, the lawyer had made it painfully clear as to his dependence upon his wife's estate for anything beyond the allowance which had been provided in the will, and had listened calmly and imperturbably to the rantings of the angry and disappointed man. Now the positions were reversed, and Vallie's attitude was cheerful and confident, with nothing to suggest that he stood in a self-appointed position of injured husband. The conversation, guided by the lawyer, went far more deeply into the various phases of the subject than the earlier one had done, but the result was no more satisfactory. Determined as he was to demonstrate his individuality and his independence, Spencer's arrogance and insolence exceeded all bounds. Amsden accepted the abuse which he heaped upon his head with equanimity, but scored him so roundly when his insults touched Lucy that he found little satisfaction. The only telling point he made was when he demanded whether Lucy had not dined or lunched alone with Cunningham at other times, even though she denied the present instance.

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"Why, yes," she admitted frankly; "but there has never been the slightest thing during my acquaintance with Ned to which any one could take exception."

"Are you sure?" Spencer again demanded, on a chance shot. Lucy's mind suddenly reverted to the one unfortunate experience she had had with Cunningham, and she felt the color rush to her face. Neither man could fail to observe her temporary confusion, Vallie noting it with triumph, Amsden with surprise.

"Nothing of which I am ashamed," she insisted firmly.

To Lucy, the discussion confirmed the certainty of all that she dreaded, and the old man's words of encouragement lost their comforting power; to Amsden it was evident that he had to deal with a man whose desire for retaliation had destroyed all perspective of decency. Sooner or later the lawyer was confident that a compromise could be effected, but he feared that before that moment arrived the damage would be done.

"Well, Lucy," Amsden said at length, with deep sorrow in his voice, "I know of nothing more to say or do. We are not dealing with a rational being, but with a madman who is so obsessed with his one desire to injure that argument or persuasion is equally futile. There is no court in the world which would accept the flimsy evidence on which he bases his threats, and you would come through such an ordeal in a far better light than he."

"I have no interest at all in its effect upon me," she replied, weakly.

"I know, and he is taking advantage of the same knowledge; but what he has to gain I cannot comprehend."

"There are many things you have yet to learn how to comprehend," Spencer remarked, in no way disturbed by Amsden's words.

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"Yes," Amsden answered sharply; "and there are some for which I have no desire for comprehension. Now, one more question: How much longer are you planning to remain in Lucy's house?"

Spencer looked up quickly.

"I mean just that," Amsden replied to his questioning expression. "It is apparently necessary for some one to remind you that under the existing circumstances it is not agreeable to her to have you beneath the same roof. You have no claims now which need to be respected. Will formal action be required?"

The change in the old man's manner took Spencer by surprise, and for a moment the flush in his face was the only evidence that he appreciated the meaning of his words. Then the suave, self-satisfied expression altered, and was replaced by the malignant glitter in his eyes which Lucy had come to dread and abhor.

"So I'm ordered out of my own house, am I?" he demanded.

"It never has been your house except through your wife's indulgence," Amsden said sternly. "There is much besides which you have enjoyed through the same generous source. Now all that is ended."

"Do you stand for that, Lucy?" Vallie turned suddenly to his wife.

"Oh, Vallie, what an ending!" she cried. "Is there no way that we can keep this pitiful state of affairs to ourselves?"

"Yes," he replied unexpectedly.

"What is it?" Lucy exclaimed, hope again coloring her voice; "for pity's sake tell me what it is! There is nothing I will not sacrifice."

Spencer paused a moment. "There are three condi-

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tions," he said deliberately. "If you will meet them I will agree to a quiet separation."

"What are they?" she begged.

"First, that you make over to me, unconditionally, one half of the property which stands in your name."

"We'll do it," Lucy cried; "we'll do it, won't we, Mr. Amsden?"

"Second, that Cunningham apologizes to me for what he said the night he brought you home."

"Oh, he wouldn't do that! He has nothing to apologize for." The hopefulness waned in her voice.

"Hear him through," Amsden urged. "Let us get the whole story and see whether anything can be done."

"Third, that I take one of the children."

Lucy drew her breath sharply, but the physical weakness which affected her when she heard the second condition disappeared. She sprang to her feet and stood erect and fearless, facing Spencer with a determination so at variance with the broken woman she appeared but a moment before that it startled both of the men.

"What do you mean?" she demanded. "You want one of the children! Why, you wouldn't recognize them if you met them away from the house."

"Still, they're my children," he insisted doggedly, "and I shall claim my rights."

"Your rights!" she repeated scornfully after him. Then she suddenly turned to Amsden. "Is there any chance that I shall lose my children if the suit is brought?"

"Not the slightest," he reassured her.

"Your rights!" she repeated again, facing Spencer with all thought of conciliation abandoned. "What rights can remain which you have not already forfeited? Give up Larry or Babs to you? I would rather see them

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dead! Give up my children, who are more to me than all the world? Nothing on earth could ever make me do it. Go on with your suit, Vallie. Do anything that you wish. I am through with argument or persuasion. I am through with this awful agonizing. I am through with you!"

"I thought you wanted to save Cunningham's reputation," Spencer suggested. "You seem to have forgotten that."

"I have forgotten nothing," she replied, still at white heat, yet strangely calm. "I was ready to make any sacrifice except that to save him from what might come from this miserable affair, but now we will fight it out to the equally miserable end. Ned himself wouldn't ask me to make that sacrifice. Give up Larry or Babs just when they have learned to love me and I have learned to know them? You have no idea what you are asking, — no woman would do that. — Larry! Babs!" she cried, seeing them in the garden, her face lighting with a calm happiness at their quick response to her call.

She stood very straight, with one arm about the boy's shoulders, the other hand resting on Babs' golden head. "Look!" she said, facing Amsden with a new confidence born of the touch of the childish bodies against her own, "look! Do you think any man could ask a mother to value his reputation above these?"

XXIX

SPENCER decided that affairs had reached a point where it would be desirable to secure legal advice. Until now it had seemed safe to postpone definite action, as the situation was entirely satisfactory as it was, but at the present moment everything was up in the air again, and he realized that he had overplayed his hand. The first and second conditions were the vital ones after all, and those he probably could have secured. The financial end was safe at all events, Cunningham might make the apology in order to simplify matters for Lucy, and the question of the children could perhaps be yielded. Yes, he had overplayed his hand, and in taking this next step he must make no second mistake.

He was unwilling to give Lucy the satisfaction of seeing that he even remembered Amsden's suggestion to leave the house, but as it was wise to consult his attorney without delay he took a leisurely departure late the following morning. On arrival in town he found that his lawyer was away for a few days, so, cursing his luck that he had not telephoned in advance, he debated as to his next move. Being in the city, it occurred to him that he might drop in at his office without excessive inconvenience, particularly as its location was but a few blocks from where he now was. These had been unusually eventful days for him, and he felt fatigued. If he went to the Badminton

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Club he was sure to meet men he knew, and he was in no mood for conversation; but at the office he could make sure that he was left alone.

Thoroughly out of sorts with himself and every one else, Spencer covered the short distance between the two buildings and entered his office. Usually his intermittent appearances there attracted little attention, and he was surprised to have the head clerk leave his desk and follow him into the private room.

"Well?" he interrogated, turning on him sharply, "what is it?"

The clerk held out a letter. "This came for you this morning, and the messenger said it was urgent. We have been telephoning Beverly Farms and Marblehead to find out where to send it. I was on the point of despatching some one down to your house with it."

Spencer recognized the handwriting as he took the letter without comment. Waiting until the door was closed, he opened the envelope with a scowl upon his face. She should not have done this. He had explicitly instructed her never to send him anything in writing, and he was annoyed that she had disregarded his wishes. Then he read the few hastily written words, whistled softly to himself, and flopped disconsolately into a large leather chair, completely exhausted by the day's complications. Here was a situation which demanded careful consideration indeed! On one side his wife and her lawyer arrayed against him, and all in the shadow of the divorce court; on the other a demand from a woman of whose antecedents he was ignorant that he rescue her from the hands of the police! Spencer actually squirmed with distress and indecision, and finally stretched himself out at full length, pressing his hands to his temples.

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"God!" he exclaimed aloud, "did a fellow ever find himself in such a mess!" He groaned audibly. "And I never did care for women anyhow," he added in a discouraged tone.

Pity for himself rapidly gained strength. She demanded that he come to the District-Attorney's office and force them to release her; but of course he could not do that. She was held as an accessory on a charge of murder, the letter said. In his present state of mind Spencer had little doubt that, being a woman, she was guilty of any charge they might bring against her. He shuddered as he thought of the risk he had run: she might even have murdered him when she found that he could not pay the bills he had allowed her to run up! Of course he could not be expected to mix in with a murder case: he would cut a pretty figure standing as the champion of this woman; and, what was more to the point, the episode could not have come at a more unfortunate time. Still undecided, he was interrupted by a knock at the door. What new complication now? he thought as it opened and the clerk reappeared.

"A gentleman on the wire wishes to know where he can find you."

"Who is it?"

"He didn't give his name."

"Find out who it is — no, I'll take it. Have the call switched onto the private line. Well," he said brusquely, picking up the receiver, "who is it?"

"Is that you, Spencer?" the voice demanded.

"Yes; who are you?"

"Cunningham," repeated the voice. "I hadn't expected to find you at the office, but I've tried everywhere else. I must see you immediately on a matter of great importance."

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"Cunningham!" Vallie repeated to himself, with his hand over the transmitter. So Lucy had reached him after all, and the tone in his voice showed his concern! Good! This completed the circle, and after taking his satisfaction out on him he would be ready for the final adjustment. Spencer stiffened up in his chair, and his manner recovered some of its former confidence.

"I don't know that I care especially to see you," he replied; "but if you'll come right over, I'll wait for you."

"Very well," the voice replied; "I'll be there inside of ten minutes."

Punctual to the moment, Cunningham was ushered into Spencer's office. He made no attempt to be cordial, and from the expression on his face Vallie saw that he was seriously upset by the matter on his mind. "I presume you already know why I have called," Cunningham began.

"I told you the other night that the worm would turn," Spencer observed, with a certain gratification in his voice.

"The other night? The worm would turn? I don't think I understand."

"You've come to talk with me about Lucy, haven't you?"

"Yes; I want to spare the child if it is possible."

"Your very commendable idea comes rather late."

"Then she knows about it?"

"Yes; and every one else will know about it soon."

Cunningham groaned. "You might have spared her that," he said.

"I might have spared you too, I presume?" Spencer added suggestively.

"You might have spared all her friends; but now that it is too late, we must shield her as much as we can. Have you been to the District-Attorney's office yet?"

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Spencer rose to his feet, enraged. "So you're butting in on that again, are you? I told you that it was my affair."

"I know it is, but for Lucy's sake I don't want you to be dragged into it any more than is necessary. Are you going to respond to that letter?"

"What do you know about any letter?" Spencer demanded angrily. "How —"

"I know all about it," Cunningham interrupted impatiently. "I read it at the District-Attorney's office before it was sent to you. It's the Montgomery case, you know."

Spencer's jaw fell and he gazed into Cunningham's face in utter amazement. "The Montgomery case!" he repeated. "Do you mean to tell me —"

"This woman is suspected of being either the principal or else Montgomery's accomplice, — it is certain that she was in the buggy when the shots were fired. When she was arrested she named you as a 'next friend,' and that brings you into the limelight. I've kept it from the papers so far, for I hoped Lucy might be spared this final humiliation; but of course if she knows it already it is too late, as you say."

Affairs were moving too swiftly for Vallie to keep pace with them. At the mention of the Montgomery case and the news that he had been drawn into it he sank back into the chair from which he had excitedly risen. Cunningham was not surprised to see him so visibly affected: the situation was such as might well test the nerve of a stronger man; yet he had no conception of what was actually passing through his mind. Here was Cunningham, whose name Spencer had threatened to couple with Lucy's, in full possession of all the damnable facts concern-

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ing his relations with this woman, and it was only because of his desire to shield Lucy that the evening papers had not come out with the whole story. He could see Lucy's disgust reach its culminating point; he could hear "Poppy" Amsden's scornful denunciation and permission to proceed and do his worst!

"Lucy knows nothing about this," he said at length.

"But I thought you told me —"

"I misunderstood your question," Spencer replied, not caring to go into further explanations.

"Then we must plan things somehow so as to keep her from knowing," Cunningham said, with relief in his voice. "Of course you have no information about this woman which bears on the case?"

"No," was the reply.

"Then I think we can keep you out of it. You are not planning to make any effort in her behalf?"

"No," Spencer said; "there is no reason why I should."

"I'm glad of that, for it simplifies matters. You had better make no reply to her note. I will arrange with the District-Attorney's office so that you will not be brought into the case."

"Thank you." Spencer acknowledged his appreciation with an inward sense of gratitude toward Cunningham which fifteen minutes before he would not have believed himself capable of feeling.

"You are under no obligations to me," Cunningham hastened to tell him. "If you alone were concerned I am frank to say that I might have allowed matters to run their course, but I have seen Lucy's brave struggle to keep up her courage in the face of your indifference and neglect, and am glad to contribute in any way possible to her peace of mind. You are being saved from a notoriety

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you could never live down, and if you care to manifest appreciation, I beg of you to express it by giving her the best there is in you instead of the worst."

Instinctively Spencer would have liked to resent Cunningham's uncompromising words, but he felt himself in no position to do so. Even with his brain addled by the unusual demands the day's complications had placed upon it, the irony of this latest situation was even too apparent. The triumph he had anticipated tasted of gall and wormwood. This man whom he had marked for public execration now alone saved him from occupying the same position! As he listened to his words the absurdity of the charge he had contemplated struck him with discouraging force: who could be made to believe, by any possible evidence, that eyes from which honor and integrity shone with such direct clearness, that the voice in which such sincerity was the dominant note, could belong to one capable of departing from the straight line of upright living! These very elements of strength which he resented formed his own protection now; but they rankled in his heart and he would have sacrificed much to discover an escape from the necessity of accepting immunity from the hand of the man he longed to attack.

Cunningham saw that he was face to face with an opportunity, and was not slow to complete the work he had begun. "I had expected that our next meeting would be of a nature far different from what this has proved to be," he continued with deliberation, "but perhaps it is better as it is. There are a few things which you ought to hear, Spencer, for your own good, and I'm inclined to believe that circumstances have taken affairs into their own hands and made me their agent: I meant every word I said to you the other night, and your contemptible letter

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to Mrs. Cunningham gives me the right to speak even more plainly. Lucy is as fine a woman as the good Lord ever gave as wife to an unappreciative husband, but she is high strung and possessed of a personality which explodes every time it is too long compressed. One of those explosions came that night I brought her home to you. There was no damage done, — only a brilliant display of fireworks, but there was need for some one to be on hand to put his foot on the sparks. I don't blame her; the responsibility rests with you. I know you don't care for my advice, and I know you won't believe me when I say that it is as disagreeable to me to give it as for you to listen, but the fact remains: if Lucy means no more to you than you seem to show, for Heaven's sake, man, take some steps to give her back her freedom and let her live her own life. There are men who could give her something to live for, and I have no doubt she will find her happiness if only offered the chance. Then go ahead and hit the pace you've set for yourself this summer, if that is what you enjoy. It is a crime for two people to make such a mess of things as you and Lucy are doing, and this is your chance to show what you have in you."

Spencer's face was livid with anger by the time Cunningham concluded, but a wholesome fear of what might result if the lawyer's assurance of protection was withdrawn served to hold back the hot retort he would have liked to make. This was the apology he had looked forward to with so much satisfaction!

"You've got me in a corner," he said sullenly, "and I suppose I must take my medicine; but it doesn't strike me as altogether manly to rub it in when the other chap isn't in a position to defend himself. I've told you that I'm obliged to you for keeping this mess out of the papers

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and for fixing it so as to keep me out of it too. If you've said all you think is necessary, I suggest that we consider the interview closed."

"It is quite evident that I have not said all that is necessary," Cunningham replied, rising, "but I agree with you that it is desirable to conclude our conference. If I need you, I will send for you."

CUNNINGHAM left town two days after his interview with Spencer. The plans for the prosecution were completed, and he was quite ready for a holiday after his unusually confining summer. More than this, he was eager for the opportunity to drive from Margaret's mind the foolish anxiety which Vallie's letter had given her, — foolish, yet to be respected because it had seemed real to her. He made no attempt to argue, though it seemed an act of treachery to go away without seeing Lucy, to make more plain to her, if the necessity remained, that his part in that unfortunate evening's experience had been prompted by friendship alone. But Margaret's peace of mind meant more to him than any possibility of misunderstanding with any one else in the world, so he postponed straightening out this perplexity until she was able to look at the matter in a rational light. Spencer's letter had undoubtedly been written as the result of a moment's pique, and of course was not worthy of a second thought. Knowing the complications by which the man was at present overwhelmed, Margaret's fears seemed almost grotesque in their absurdity; but of these he could not speak even to her. He hoped that Spencer would take some of his advice to heart, but this was a desire rather than an expectation.

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September took its place upon the calendar, bringing with it varied emotions to different people. To many of those on the North Shore it meant simply a continuation of the summer gaieties at Lenox or Stockbridge before turning their thoughts upon the homegoings and the sterner interests of "the season" in town; to Margaret it had brought the eagerly anticipated outing with her husband which he had promised her; to Langdon it signified the approaching trial upon which his mind had so long been focused; to Lucy Spencer it was an extended period of uncertainty.

She had seen her husband but twice since the interview with Amsden, when he had come to the house to complete arrangements for transferring his belongings to The Yacht Club at Marblehead. There had been no conversation, and she had no reason to expect other than a speedy serving of the threatened libel. Amsden explained that there was nothing to do but to await developments, urging her in the meantime to see Cunningham and to place in his possession all the facts in the case. He saw no way to avert the catastrophe, but being forewarned the effect of the attack could at least be minimized. At present he was away, and his office reported that he had left no address, wishing to prevent any possible interruption to his vacation. As the worst that Spencer could do during the interval was to have the papers served, Amsden did not consider the delay serious, but he was as surprised as Lucy that Vallie so long postponed taking this preliminary step.

So the uncertainty continued, wearing Lucy out with the painful anxiety of waiting. The September days at the shore were the rarest of the summer, but each morning brought to her a sense of impending disaster, each night

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a feeling akin to regret that the long period of suspense was still unbroken. She shrank from the thought of seeing any one, yet she longed for some sympathetic spirit with whom she might share her burden. The Cunninghams were, of course, away, Valentine had eliminated himself from her life except as an element of torture, Auchester had made his existence known only by a letter expressing sorrow for having unintentionally caused her pain. She had not answered it yet, for she was not sure that his self-reproach was justified. As she looked back upon that evening, even with the complications which had since ensued, she was conscious of a sense of satisfaction that her personality had called forth from such a man a declaration of devotion. Of course he should not have made it, but the intoxicating knowledge that he loved her made her present suffering easier to bear. She had never been able to analyze her feeling toward him. Marriage, in her mind, possessed no attractions, but her whole being called for love. Could the two be associated? Did she love Auchester, or was she simply in love with love? She could not tell.

Fully aware of her isolation, Lucy wondered that she was not oppressed by loneliness; yet no sense of this had entered into her thoughts. It is the last weight which makes the scales turn: she did not realize that the possibility of losing one of her children had been the means at last of bringing to the surface that mother-love which Margaret and Ned had striven so hard to call into being. She was with them constantly now, making their lives her life, discovering in the process much that was new to her. Susette marveled at the change, but true woman that she was, rejoiced that they could find a response to those demands of growing childhood which none but a mother

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can give. Child-like, they had forgotten that any other condition had ever existed, content in their present joy of sympathetic companionship.

Then the Cunninghams returned, and Lucy would have gone to Ned at once, hard as it was for her to do it, but Amsden urged further delay. Spencer had still to make his preliminary move, and the lawyer knew the importance of leaving Cunningham free from diverting thoughts during the period of the trial, now close at hand. So the suspense continued.

Commonwealth v. Montgomery appeared no different on the Court Calendar from hundreds of other entries which dragged their slow length along from month to month as mute protestants against the law's delay; but in the minds of the people it was the only case the calendar contained. Even a clever stage manager could not have planned a more dramatic climax than the woman's apprehension had supplied, and that portion of the dear public which thrives upon excitement discussed the problem at every street corner, advanced theories based only upon the unauthentic reports contained in the sensational daily press, judged, and passed sentence. Fortunately it was beyond their power to place the victim in the electric chair.

Cunningham's prominence in the trial was accentuated by the critical illness of the Attorney-General, which left him, with the District-Attorney, in practical control. The evidence in the hands of the prosecution had not warranted a charge of murder against the woman, but was of sufficiently direct nature to hold her as the most important witness in the case. Langdon, impressed by Montgomery's behavior at the time he showed him the photograph, and since, was convinced that his client was shielding her,

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and directed his efforts toward shifting the probabilities from the man to his companion. By this time she had dropped all theatricals and was desperately alive to the seriousness of her position; yet nothing could weaken her impassioned denial of any acquaintance with or knowledge of Montgomery. The attitude of the two was noteworthy, as the man maintained his sullen, indifferent demeanor, making Langdon's efforts in his behalf even more difficult than necessary.

The preliminaries of the great trial were passed through with only the ordinary delays incidental to the impaneling of the jury, the personnel of which Langdon watched with jealous care. The District-Attorney opened for the prosecution and outlined what the State undertook to prove. The expressman who had heard the shots, the farm laborers who discovered the bodies in the buggy, and a few other less important witnesses gave what little information they possessed, but the evidence brought out by their examination and cross-examination in no way incriminated Montgomery beyond the incontestable fact that he and Brewster were together at the time of the latter's death. The mystery still remained unsolved, and Langdon felt elated that the Government's case appeared so weak. Then, to his intense surprise and gratification, the woman was asked to take the stand. This step, on the part of the prosecution, was exactly what the defense desired, but Langdon could not believe that Cunningham would dare give him the opportunity for which he was amply prepared. Was it an expression of Ned's altruistic policy in order to give the prisoner the benefit of any possible mistake? Was it evidence that he was already convinced that Montgomery was innocent? Was it a yielding to the unwise urging of the District-Attorney? He could not

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settle it in his own mind, and he knew that Cunningham would never disclose the facts; but it was enough that the opportunity was there to be embraced. Montgomery's indifference had from the beginning baffled him to the point of despair, but with this woman on the witness-stand Langdon could prove the presence of a third party in the buggy, which must at least raise a reasonable doubt as to the prisoner's guilt, despite the man's dogged refusal to assist his case.

Langdon listened attentively to the futile efforts of the prosecution to tear from the unwilling witness an admission that she was in the buggy, or that she had ever known or even seen the prisoner. If they had counted on any direct evidence from this source, they had gained nothing but disappointment. Then she was turned over to the defense, and Langdon began his cross-examination. He recognized in her obstinacy a subordinate form of egoism which, if contradicted, would simply be made more firm. From the first, therefore, he appeared to accept her statement that she was unacquainted with the prisoner, that she was not in the buggy, and that the assumption of her connection with the case at all was based upon error. Encouraged by support instead of the opposition she had expected, the woman became less suspicious and talked freely: she not only answered the questions which were put to her, but volunteered much information concerning herself which, if substantiated, would at once eliminate her from the problem.

After she stepped lightly and confidently from the stand, Langdon's assisting counsel presented the case for the defense, deprecating the necessity in view of the weakness of the evidence submitted by the State. It was not incumbent upon them to prove the prisoner innocent,

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as the Government had failed so utterly to establish even the presumption of guilt. They proposed to place the prisoner himself upon the stand, after which witnesses would be called to prove the actual presence of a third party.

Little came from the examination or cross-examination of Montgomery. All in all, the effect of his replies was favorable to the defense. Then witnesses were introduced whose testimony tore the woman's statements into shreds. Langdon was pitiless in showing her mendacity, for he believed her guilty, and when the culmination came in evidence which showed that she had lived with Montgomery as his wife, and actually placed her in the buggy at the time the shots were fired, no one of the spectators of the human tragedy doubted that the case against Montgomery would be dropped and the woman substituted as the criminal.

Langdon prepared himself for the final argument when Cunningham surprised him by asking that he permit Montgomery to be recalled to the stand. Conscious of the advantage he had gained, he did not hesitate to give assent.

"I wish to question the defendant upon one or two points which I omitted during the cross-examination," Cunningham said, as Montgomery took his place. "Was your reconciliation with Brewster sincere?"

"It was." The prisoner's hand, resting on the rail in front of him, closed tightly.

"What were Brewster's relations to the woman in the buggy?"

"I have never seen this woman before," he insisted doggedly.

"Yet you testified that there was a woman."

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"Yes."

"But it was not this woman?"

"No."

"What were Brewster's relations to this woman?"

"The same as mine." Again the fingers, which had relaxed, tightened.

"And what were yours?"

"Friendly."

"But you had quarreled with Brewster?"

"Yes."

"Over the woman?"

"Yes."

"Yet your reconciliation was genuine?"

"Yes."

"That will do," Cunningham concluded.

Still further surprised that the prosecution should have thought it desirable to ask Montgomery questions which covered points already substantiated, Langdon rose for his argument. He called attention to the weakness of the State in the absence of direct evidence, and emphasized the alternative possibilities. A man had been killed, but what had been brought forth to show that the fatality was other than accidental? His client has been charged with the crime, but what had been shown to prove that he fired the fatal shot? Was not the fact that the prisoner himself was wounded a better argument in his defense than the State had yet advanced against him, as evidence that both shots had been fired by a third party? Langdon explained the difficulties he had experienced in securing his client's coöperation. This he attributed to a desire on Montgomery's part to shield the real criminal, and he gave it as his reason for proving the presence of the woman in the buggy in spite of the prisoner's flat denial

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under oath. He disclaimed the intention of throwing suspicion upon any one in particular, but as it had been shown by the defense that a third party was actually present at the time of the murder, was it not at least possible that some one, not yet accused, might be the real assassin?

When Cunningham rose to make his argument for the State many supposed that he would concede the position taken by the defense, and Langdon, knowing his convictions better than any one else, was bitterly disappointed to discover that he intended still to contest. Then his eye passed from Cunningham to the jury box and from there to the spectators, and the universal surprise which was manifested gave him confidence.

Cunningham's argument was a long one. "What the defense has so ably shown," he said at one point, "is entitled to the utmost consideration and should count its full weight in favor of the accused, but from the standpoint of the prosecution, it appears that the search has been directed more toward the personality of the criminal than the study of the causal conditions of the crime. Causal law does not claim that all which occurs has a single ground, but brings the searchlight of investigation upon the efficient or satisfying cause, not only for the deed itself, but for each individual detail. Upon the final success or failure in correlating these causes when found depends the existence or the non-existence of a case. It is not within the province of the prosecution to say that the prisoner committed the crime of which he stands accused; the responsibility for that decision rests with the gentlemen of the jury. The State is eager for no man's blood, but she is jealous of the sanctity of life within her jurisdiction. In arriving at their decision the gentlemen

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of the jury must piece together, as the prosecution has done, the facts as they exist and the probabilities as they appear, and unless the result is moral certainty of guilt, the prisoner is entitled to acquittal.

“To the prosecution the case resolves itself into another eternal triangle: two men and a woman, jealousy, uncontrolled anger or deliberate forethought, culminating in accident. The defense has shown that two years ago this woman was living with the prisoner as his wife; it has shown that Brewster became infatuated with her and was the occasion of trouble between them; it has shown that an apparent reconciliation was made between the two men, and that on the fatal night the three parties concerned were on their way together to the city. Why did Montgomery place the revolver in his pocket if the reconciliation was genuine? What occurred to transfer it from his pocket into the hands of one of the occupants of the buggy? There was no quarrel, there were no loud words, as proved by the testimony we have heard. Into whose hands did the revolver pass? If it could be shown that the wounds found on the two men could possibly have been inflicted by any third party, in the buggy or out of it, the prosecution would feel that the defense was complete; but in the absence of such evidence the case can only be reconstructed as a premeditated murder. The prosecution is bound to assume that Montgomery with deadly intent placed the weapon against Brewster’s side and fired the shot which killed him, and that the second shot resulted from a struggle between the prisoner and this woman here, frightened and perhaps frenzied, during which an accidental discharge sent the bullet into the body of the second man. This solution of what has seemed to be a mystery is, I admit freely, hypothetical,

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and should be considered only in case the prisoner himself has conveyed to you a definite impression of guilt.

"In the consideration of this point you are entitled to know the processes by which the prosecution has arrived at its conclusion. The defense has questioned the relevancy of the testimony introduced regarding the 'timbre' of speech. You have listened patiently to the statements of two reputable physicians as to the effect which a certain physiological phenomenon produces upon persons who deny what they know to be the truth. They have told you that the stimulation of the nerves influences the snapping movement of the mouth, which alternates with the reflex tendency to swallow, that it causes lapses in blood pressure and palpitation of the heart by means of disturbances of the heart action. The meaning of their statements is that all this taken together causes the lightly vibrating, cold, and toneless voice which you must have noticed when the prisoner was placed upon the stand to deny his guilt. It is so significant that the expert is rarely deceived.

"Let not the fact that this woman has falsely sworn to have been elsewhere on the night of the crime bear too much weight against her. In the history of criminology you will find countless cases where the denial of circumstances which have no essential relation to the deed have left behind the real problem of evidence. In countless cases you will find guilt falsely established because these denied non-essential circumstances have been proved to be facts. There is no question in the mind of the prosecution that this woman was in the buggy at the time of the murder, but her presence there does not make her the criminal. If she had at once admitted it and given what I believe to be the real facts, she would not now

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rest under the suspicion which the defense has cast about her.

"The vital evidence in this case has been given by the defendant himself. Lest the full effect of it be lost upon some of the gentlemen of the jury, the prosecution asked that he be recalled to the stand. If he was telling the truth, why did he clench his fist whenever Brewster's name was mentioned?"

Cunningham paused deliberately as he put the question, allowing its full significance to sink into the minds of his hearers. Then he continued: "He did not tell the truth with his lips, gentlemen, but rather with his gesture, which is the physical correlate. The very thought of the man Brewster caused an inner resentment that dominated his body even though he was able to control his speech. Those of you who have watched him throughout the trial must have observed that the same phenomenon occurred every time Brewster's name was mentioned.

"It may be claimed that the application of psychology to criminology is unusual, but that is only because its importance has been slow in being recognized. In dealing with crime the Government is under obligations to employ every known expedient to discover the truth and to administer justice. Whether or not the gentlemen of the jury believe in the nature of the evidence submitted rests in their hands. The defendant is entitled to the benefit of any reasonable doubt, and the prosecution feels that it has done its whole duty in placing before you its convictions as well as its doubts, with no desire to sway your judgment from the straight path which justice demands."

The silence which followed the close of Cunningham's argument was evidence enough of the deep impression

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which his words had created. The judge made a brief charge to the jury, and the only sound which followed was the shuffling of their feet as they retired for deliberation. For hour after hour and far into the night the spectators remained in their seats, relieving the tension by quietly discussing in little groups the probable outcome, which no one could clearly foresee.

At last it was announced that the jury had arrived at a decision, and the excitement again became tense. The jurymen silently filed in, seated themselves, and awaited the question from the clerk.

"Gentlemen of the jury, will you make answer as your names are called?"

The crier counted as they answered. The clerk called the prisoner, and when all were in their accustomed places, he again addressed the jury.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you agreed on your verdict?"

The foreman answered in the affirmative. Then the clerk turned to the prisoner. "James Montgomery, hold up your right hand. Mr. Foreman, look upon the prisoner. Prisoner, look upon the foreman. What say you, Mr. Foreman; is James Montgomery, prisoner at the bar, guilty or not guilty?"

With the silence in the courtroom so tense that not a syllable was lost, the foreman made answer: "Guilty of murder in the first degree."

The Court silenced the murmur which involuntarily rose as the tension was relaxed.

"Gentlemen of the jury," droned the clerk, so mechanically that many of the spectators instinctively rebelled, "harken to your verdict as the Court has recorded it. You upon your oaths do say that James

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Montgomery is guilty of murder in the first degree. So say you, Mr. Foreman, and so you all say, gentlemen."

After a few moments devoted to details the clerk, ordered by the Court, again spoke. "James Montgomery, have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon you?"

The prisoner maintained a dogged silence, yet, for a condemned man, there was an evidence of relief and satisfaction which could but impress his counsel, who particularly noticed it. Langdon entered formal exceptions. Montgomery and the witnesses were removed, the jury dismissed, and court adjourned. Cunningham found his departure impeded by scores of men who crowded about him to offer their congratulations; for in the moment, whether he desired it or not, his preëminence as a criminal lawyer had been established. He refused to accept any of the compliments which were offered him. "This is not a case of personal triumph or disappointment," he insisted; "it is simply an effort to secure justice and justice only."

At last he pushed his way to the door, where he came face to face with Langdon. Instinctively he held out his hand, and words of praise were on his lips for the young lawyer's handling of his first big case. But Langdon deliberately drew back, his face drawn and his voice quavering with emotion.

"It is a crime to convict a man on any such evidence," he said in a low tone which Cunningham alone heard. "But it wasn't the evidence which did convict him, — it was your damnable persuasiveness."

Cunningham staggered for a moment under the blow which Langdon's words dealt him, but reason held back the reply he would otherwise have made. "You're worn

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out, Tom, or you wouldn't say that to me," he said patiently. "You know me better than to say that." And placing his arm about him as if he were a younger brother, the two men walked down the courthouse steps out into the city street.

XXXI

DURING the weeks occupied by the Montgomery trial, the North Shore gradually became deserted, and Lucy Spencer was among those who moved back to their city homes. Here she found evidences that Vallie had transferred his Lares and Penates elsewhere, and she learned later that he had taken up his abode at the Badminton Club. But still he took no action!

The evolution of a dreaded event, delayed in its culmination is a curious phenomenon. Apprehension at first overwhelms, later giving way to a demand for realization: "since it must come, let it come now!" When this demand remains unanswered, the familiarity which comes from living with Dread lessens its horror: "I thought you terrifying, but lo! you had your opportunity and embraced it not! Have I not magnified your power?" When Dread strikes not back at this defiance, the Spirit rests upon the unsafe refuge of False Assurance, for the Spirit instinctively seeks for Peace. So it was in Lucy's case. Amsden found it necessary to change his attitude, and instead of trying to ease her fears he now with difficulty convinced her that the danger still existed, and that the moment Cunningham was released by the close of the trial, she must hasten to him. She knew that he was right; it was only cowardice which caused her hesitation.

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Then the moment which she had awaited and yet dreaded finally arrived, as all such moments must. She found it in the scare-lines of the morning paper as she came down to breakfast, for now her day began with the children's. Oblivious to all else, she devoured every word, absorbed by the interest of Cunningham's unexpected argument, surprised by the verdict, and appalled by the personal significance of the ending of the trial. She was pleased by the unstinted praise given to Langdon, but it was her pride which rejoiced over the encomiums bestowed on Ned. Then, as an aftermath to her pleasure, there came a full realization that the higher he rose in man's esteem, the more shining and vulnerable mark he made for the attack which Vallie planned against him. How could she bring herself to tell him the whole story!

Margaret was the single refuge to which Lucy's troubled mind turned. Surely a woman's heart would respond to another woman's needs! Shortly after breakfast she telephoned, and was frightened, as she hung the receiver up, to realize that the appointment was actually made for that evening. How could she keep it!

It was with positive relief that she found Margaret alone. When the limousine stopped in front of the Cunninghams' house, Lucy dragged herself rather than walked up the steps, and it seemed an eternity that she was left alone in the reception room. She did not realize that she noticed anything, yet for weeks afterward the details remained vividly photographed upon the sensitized film of her mental vision. She could have drawn with absolute fidelity the intricate pattern of the silk prayer rug at her feet; she knew the exact number of tiles which went to make the hearth before the fireplace, though she had never consciously counted them; she could have described

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without an error the arrangement of the pictures on each wall. She and that room could never become disassociated!

"Welcome!" Margaret greeted her cheerfully. The month's holiday with her husband had dissipated earlier apprehensions. She had grown accustomed to having Ned's judgment proved right, and Vallie's letter and the covert threat it contained now seemed as absurd to her as it had from the first to her husband. Then, too, the trial was over and the strain upon Ned was lightened. She had read these further recognitions of his abilities and, wife-like, was experiencing her triumph.

"Come into the library," Margaret continued. "Ned is lying down. He is completely used up, but he insisted that I call him when you came."

"Not yet," Lucy urged quickly; "I want to talk with you first."

Then she told the story, simply and yet with agonizing directness, to her companion. Margaret's contented bearing changed with the first sensing of danger to her husband. Lucy, intent upon carrying through to its bitter end her humiliating story, did not see the frightened look come into her eyes, nor the lines of pain which settled about her mouth. So the specter which had haunted her was not dead after all, but still stalked abroad awaiting its opportunity to strike him whom she loved best where it would hurt him most! Curiously, Lucy had not fully comprehended the effect of her story upon Margaret. She was conscious of her own pain and appreciated Cunningham's concern for himself; but when she looked up at the close of her recital and saw the change wrought in those brief moments in her companion's face, she knew that it was Margaret who would suffer more than Ned.

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"Peggy dear," she cried, aghast at the result of her words, "you are ill!"

"No, no! go on. I must hear it all."

When it was over there was an awful silence. It was pitifully clear to Margaret. She understood exactly how it had come about and could find no blame in her heart, yet she cried out in protest against the injustice. Here were two children, as they seemed to her, who had played with deadly explosives, unmindful of their destructive power, and she stood by about to witness the fatal tragedy, powerless to prevent! If Lucy had felt the situation before, it was aggravated a thousand-fold by Margaret's silent suffering. Oh! if she could go back and live those months over again!

"I am only too ready to sacrifice myself," she said at length.

"I know," Margaret answered; "but even that sacrifice will not save Ned now."

"If Vallie would only take my property, all of it."

"That would be a simple solution, for, of course, money couldn't count against Ned's reputation."

Then the thought came to Lucy that there was still one sacrifice which could be made, which she had believed to be beyond consideration. Margaret had not suggested it, and yet —

"Margaret," she said slowly, "do you think — is it my duty to give up one of the children? I thought —"

"Don't ask me that!" was the reply, almost fierce in its intensity; "you have no right to make me decide. But — if that would do it — Ned means so much more to me than your children ever have to you —"

"Margaret!" Lucy interrupted, this time speaking with a quality in her voice which caused her companion to

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raise her head and look at her with surprise. "You must take that back, dear. I know what Ned means to you, but God alone knows what those children have come to mean to me! This is but another blessing for which you and Ned are responsible, and that adds still further to my terrible responsibility. Oh! Peggy, — I want to bear all the consequences of my folly alone; and I thought I was strong enough to make any sacrifice, but when it comes to losing Larry or Babs — you must help me, dear. I'm too weak to do it myself."

"I can't, I can't!" Margaret pressed her hands against her temples. "I am as weak as you are. Ned is the only one who can decide, and we know — you and I — what he will say! I'll call him now. He must at least know what threatens, so that he may meet it squarely."

Cunningham, all unconscious of what had taken place, came breezily into the library, changing the atmosphere by his optimistic nature. He was genuinely glad to see Lucy, and in Margaret's presence. She met him almost diffidently, and it was evident that she questioned his possible attitude toward her.

"Have you forgiven me?" she asked, as she took his hand and looked frankly into his face, eager to read there the answer to her question before he could give it in words. "I was hateful to him the last time we were together," she continued, turning to Margaret, satisfied with her inspection. "He was just the same dear old Ned, rushing headlong into my troubles to save me from making a fool of myself again."

"I was the fool after all," he added generously. "I haven't seen you since Auchester called, but I've been with him several times since. I'll take back all I ever said to you about him. He's a fine fellow, and you

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were just as safe in his hands that night as you were in mine."

It was still hard to introduce the subject of the dreaded conversation. "Dear me," Lucy said as they sat down, eager to postpone the hated moment, "Ned is becoming so famous that we no-accounts won't dare speak to him! Are you really going to be elected Senator as the papers say?"

Cunningham's face became serious. "I haven't decided whether or not to let my name be considered," he said. "It would mean great sacrifices, but I have talked reform so long that it is a bit difficult to side-step when the opportunity is offered to put my principles into practice."

"I'm trying to persuade him against it," Margaret added, "but you know how determined Ned is when he thinks there's a principle involved. This Montgomery case has taken every ounce of strength he had. I thought he could rest when it was over, but now —"

"And so well over," Lucy interrupted quickly, terrified by the approach to the danger point. "I was sure that the woman was really guilty until I read your final argument. Of course every one was convinced to the contrary after that."

"Do you suppose —" Cunningham began, and then paused.

"Suppose what?" Margaret asked, wondering at the tone in his voice.

Cunningham laughed consciously. "It's perfectly ridiculous, of course, but do you suppose it would be possible for a lawyer, myself for example, to become so saturated with a subject and so controlled by an idea that he would be blinded to a fair consideration of facts which failed to fit in with his theories?"

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Lucy looked at Margaret hopelessly. "Does he expect us to answer that offhand?" she asked.

Margaret smiled in spite of the apprehension which was chilling her blood. Still, there was nothing to be gained by haste: the blow would fall all too soon as it was. "Yes," she answered Cunningham; "I think that would be quite possible, — and particularly with you. Why do you ask?"

"You do think so?" A peculiar expression crossed his face as he looked up quickly. "You do think so?" Then he turned it off lightly. "I don't know why I thought of it at just that moment; but Tom Langdon said something after the trial which bothered me."

"Please get the trial out of your mind," Margaret begged. "He has carried it with him night and day," she told Lucy. "I have really feared he would break down under the strain."

"Lucy didn't come here tonight to talk about me," he said, glad to turn the subject. "How has all gone since we saw you last?"

Her face sobered as she realized that she now stood on the brink. "Badly," she said; "and that's why I'm here. I know how tired you are, Ned, and that I ought not to burden you with another care; but matters have gone too far for me to handle by myself, and there are some things you must know."

"Of course I must know of anything that is worrying you. Here are two good friends of yours just as eager now as always to be of service; and I promise I won't rush in again without knowing more than I did last time of the character of the man."

"The man this time is Vallie," Lucy explained hesitatingly, "and he is determined to bring suit for divorce."

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"So!" Cunningham interjected. "He is determined, is he? How do you feel about it?"

"I am sure that a separation would be better for both of us; and I don't care for myself if he insists upon dragging me into court, but —"

"He can't drag you into court, — and if a separation is really the wise thing I shall insist that you get it from him, instead of the reverse."

"But you don't understand. I haven't any grounds for it."

"Neither has he," Cunningham replied shortly.

"No; but he thinks he has. That's just the point. He is making a lot out of that affair at 'Spicer's'."

Cunningham rose abruptly, shoved his hands into his pockets, and paced up and down the room. At length he stopped, standing in front of Lucy. "Tell me more," he said.

As briefly as possible she gave him an outline of the situation, but she could not even yet bring herself actually to the point of saying that he was the man her husband intended to name. She must tell him, of course, but she still postponed the evil moment.

Cunningham became more and more indignant as the story was continued. "I wouldn't have believed it possible, even for him," he kept repeating. "So unless he gets half the estate he threatens to bring suit and make the affair at 'Spicer's' the basis?"

"I'm afraid it's more than that now," Lucy said, doling out the facts piecemeal. "He also insists that he must have one of the children."

Margaret had been a silent spectator, knowing that Lucy needed Ned's advice more than her sympathy. As she sat there and heard their conversation she came to

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understand the relations which existed between the two far better than she could have learned in any other way, and for a moment pride in her husband made her forget the pain. When Lucy spoke of the children, and Margaret noted the quivering of her lips, the woman's heart could remain silent no longer.

"Lucy has yielded everything," she said simply, unwilling to have his judgment influenced by a knowledge of her own emotions, "except this last demand for either Larry or Babs. Just think, Ned, the children have come to mean to her what we believed they might, and now Vallie threatens to tear one of them away from her."

Cunningham's face lighted with a real joy as he turned to Lucy. "At last!" he cried; "at last the little mother has come into her own! I knew it would come, I knew it! Now you realize what life really is!"

Her eyes refused to respond to his happy mood, and she turned despairingly to Margaret, who quickly took up the recital where it had been interrupted.

"It appears to be a question of saving the man's reputation or keeping the child," she went on, watching him deliberately; "and Lucy and I are not strong enough to settle it."

"Then I will settle it for you," he replied decisively. "The children shall not be separated, nor shall they be taken from their mother."

"What of the man's reputation?" Margaret asked weakly.

Cunningham crossed quietly over to where his wife was sitting, and held her face gently between his hands. "Peggy darling," he said, in a tone which manifested his depth of feeling, "there are some things in life which are so far above a man's reputation that we never mention

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them in the same breath, — and mother-love is one of these. There is no man, whose reputation is worth the thought of protecting, who would hesitate a moment."

"Suppose you were that man, Ned?" she asked pointedly.

"My only anxiety would be its possible effect on you, dear. To accept the temporary responsibility of an unjust accusation would be a light penalty to pay for the satisfaction of saving a child to its mother. I know the man in this present case, and I know that he would answer your question as I have; but it will never come to that."

"Oh," Lucy cried involuntarily, "but it will!"

"It shall never come to that," he said with finality.

"But you don't understand —"

"I understand better than any one except Vallie himself," he continued confidently. "This is a matter you may safely leave in my hands. Now the question is, do you really wish a separation?"

"Yes; if the man's reputation need not suffer and I can keep my children, but —"

"I will guarantee all that; and we'll settle matters at once. Where is Vallie?"

"At the Badminton, I suppose."

Cunningham picked up the telephone.

"You're not going to talk with him now?" Lucy asked, aghast, desperately frightened that he proposed to act at once.

"I'm going to get him here right away if I can."

"But I must tell you some other things."

"Peggy," he said, addressing his wife, "I appoint you deputy sheriff. You are to prevent Lucy from saying or doing anything to interfere with me. Everything is working out to a nicety, and I don't want any interruption."

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"It is vital that you listen to her," Margaret expostulated.

Cunningham was almost impatient. The audacity of this man's threat in view of existing conditions angered him beyond control. "You must leave me alone with this," he said decisively. "There is more to it than you or Lucy realize. You must leave me alone."

The telephone call was successful. "I told you that I would send for you if you were needed," Cunningham told Spencer. "That moment has arrived. Please take a taxi and come to my house at once."

"Will you listen now?" Margaret asked as he turned from the telephone.

"I need every moment to crystallize this matter in my mind," he replied, scarcely heeding her. "Please don't break into my chain of thought."

All sorts of dire possibilities loomed up in Spencer's mind as he covered the distance as swiftly as a motor cab could carry him. At Cunningham's suggestion Margaret and Lucy had taken chairs on the farther side of the library, and Vallie did not notice them as he entered.

"What's up?" he demanded excitedly. "I thought everything was settled yesterday. Has she —"

"As far as you're concerned, I judge that things have just begun," was Cunningham's response.

"My God! you don't tell me! I thought I was through with her forever!"

"You haven't said 'good evening' to Margaret and Lucy," Ned reminded him.

His eye quickly followed Cunningham's glance, and his face clouded angrily. "What are you doing here?" he demanded of Lucy. "Isn't it enough —"

"I only suggested that you say 'good evening,'" Cun-

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ningham interrupted before he could continue further. "Our interview will be confined to ourselves."

"What is this, a trap?" Spencer asked suspiciously.

"No; it's a clearing-house," was the calm reply. "Lucy tells me that you have suggested a legal separation, and I find that the suggestion is an agreeable one to her. I've asked you to come here so that I may assist you in accomplishing what you both desire."

"Has she told you on what grounds I propose to bring suit?"

"She has intimated what you apparently had in mind when you talked with her, but of course you were not serious."

"Has she mentioned the name of the man?"

"She doesn't need to. You forget that I was there. You and I both know that there's nothing in it."

"How would such a suit affect his reputation?" Spencer asked significantly.

"No man can pass through such an experience, even though wholly innocent as in this case, without being defiled. After a nail is driven into a board you may remove the nail, but the hole still remains. I am glad that the man in question is to be spared such a misfortune."

"You are going to prevent the bringing of this suit?"

"No; you have already decided to abandon it. All I am going to do is to relieve Lucy's anxiety. I assume, in spite of what has happened, that I may still consider you a gentleman, and as such you are going to give me your word of honor that you will desert your wife for the period required by law, at the expiration of which time Lucy will apply for a divorce on those grounds. As a gentleman, you will agree that her suit will not be contested, that the two children are to remain in her

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custody before and after the divorce, and that you will accept such financial settlement as she may decide voluntarily to make. I believe that covers everything. Now I want you to tell Lucy in Margaret's presence and mine that you will agree to this."

Spencer's face expressed the gamut of emotions as Cunningham spoke with a voice so full of confidence that Margaret and Lucy were amazed. Expecting that each moment would bring out the real facts, and convinced that the final outcome could only be a triumph for Vallie, they hung on each word in an agony of suspense. Surely this arrogant disregard of Spencer's malign advantage must bring disaster! Lucy expected to hear his angry protests, Margaret feared personal violence. Instead, Vallie laughed disagreeably.

"Will I agree to it?" he repeated after Cunningham. "Certainly not! This is the time you have a boy on your hands too big to spank! — Look here, Cunningham," he said, becoming dramatic in his anger, "you told me once that there were a few things I ought to know, and then proceeded to instruct me. Now I intend to reciprocate. You have gone through your life with an idea that there is only one side to any question, and that you are on that side. You have made a certain number of people think that you are a great man, but it's because they don't know you as I do. I know you for a damned prig, so puffed up by the sense of your own importance that some day you'll explode like a toy balloon. You think now that you've got me cornered. I know what's in your mind; but I'd as soon face that as admit myself licked by you. You should have sprung this just a bit earlier, for I'll admit I shouldn't relish being mixed up with that case. But now — go ahead. Tell Lucy if you like, — tell

everybody. I'll have my papers served tomorrow. She may bring a counter-suit if she chooses, but in the process I'll get the man I'm after."

To the two women all was over, and they only awaited the final statement from Spencer that in these papers Cunningham would be named. If they had only been allowed to speak before Vallie's arrival! Margaret blamed herself that she had not risked Ned's censure by insisting against his express command. He sat there patiently and calmly. What would be his attitude if he really knew!

"So you refuse?" he asked when Spencer paused at last.

"Of course. What kind of a fool do you take me for?"

"Very well." Cunningham's patience changed into a determination which could not be mistaken. "The Montgomery case has been appealed," he said. "The witnesses will all be held to await the result of the exceptions, and I propose to add a new witness. Do you follow me, Spencer? — a new witness. I shall have him taken into custody tonight."

Vallie's insolence disappeared. The confidence which had marked his attitude up to this time vanished, and he sat dull and sullen as if stunned.

"Do you care to reconsider?" Cunningham asked him. "Now will you agree to it?"

"You know I will, damn you," he said at length, and then relapsed into his apathy.

"I was sure that I could not be mistaken," Cunningham said with satisfaction. "A gentleman always yields precedence to a lady in a matter of this kind."

Vallie rose mechanically. "There's no stopping you since you sent that poor devil to the electric chair, is there?" he said brutally.

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"If there is a re-trial, perhaps the woman will finally be convicted?" Cunningham replied with significance.

Spencer glared at him, but made no response. Then he left the room abruptly. They heard his rapid steps upon the stairway and a heavy slam of the door.

Cunningham turned to Lucy manifesting a tenderness and feeling which contrasted curiously with the attitude he had assumed with Vallie. "There," he said, with a sigh of relief; "there he goes out of your life forever." He paused for a moment in deep thought. "You two have made a sorry mess of the years you've had together," he continued, "and you are both partly to blame. Now the slate is wiped off, and I'm sure you'll make better use of the years to come."

"What does it all mean?" she demanded, still feeling as if in a dream from which she must soon awaken.

"Just a legal service which I can render him for which he could never pay except by this," Cunningham replied gravely.

"And there will be no suit?" Margaret asked, as dazed as Lucy by the sudden reversal of emotions.

"Not until Lucy brings it."

"Oh!" she cried, throwing her arms about his neck with an ecstasy which he failed to comprehend, "thank God! thank God!"

AUCHESTER found the time approaching when his sojourn in America must come to an end, and he viewed the prospect of his departure with genuine regret. The confidential business mission which had occasioned his coming to Boston had been satisfactorily concluded, but in his own affairs he acknowledged frankly to himself that he had miserably failed. Had it been mere failure to accomplish he might have forgiven himself, but to have lost through error in sizing up the situation was unpardonable. A general who meets defeat through lack of numbers or through greater skill in the opposing force may still look forward to achievement, but he who loses in an engagement based upon a false hypothesis is entitled to nothing but disgrace.

The fact that Lucy had made no reply to his letter was evidence enough of his signal defeat. He could not with self-respect do more than he had done, yet it was not easy, during these weeks, for him to sit idly by when his spirit demanded action. Her last memory of him must be that of a skulker, meekly accepting Cunningham's cutting sarcasm, tacitly admitting that he was wrong. He knew that he had squared himself with the lawyer, but to Lucy, who had looked upon him as a man of strength and courage, he must appear a paper soldier, retreating at

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the first smell of powder. What of his claims that even men's conventions possessed no terrors for him! She could but interpret his attitude throughout the whole affair as giving him the lie. She could not be expected to understand that it was alone consideration for her that had controlled his actions; she could never know how gladly he would have placed his arm about her and defied the world!

The Captain would not have believed he could be so hard hit. In the past he had smiled indulgently at fellow-officers who allowed *affaires de cœur* to place a blight even temporarily upon their lives. He was not a man to boast, but had he been forced to answer such a question, he would have expressed absolute incredulity that any woman could so make him lose conviction in himself. Now he realized that it is through personal experience alone that one learns to know the truth. Now he knew that whatever the future years held for him, his life could never be the same. He had given himself to her without reserve, he had held her in his arms, he had felt her lips against his own. This experience would mean nothing except that she was the one woman; being such, his life could but be the richer for it, albeit that the bitter mingled with the sweet.

During these weeks Lucy had dropped out of everything still more completely than during the period of her self-immolation. This prevented even an accidental meeting, which was all Auchester now had to look forward to. He had no doubt that he was the cause of her present retirement, and knowing how distressing the summer's experience had been, he assumed heavy responsibility. Any other woman would have understood the significance of his proposition, any other woman would have preconsidered

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ered the consequences, and thus prevented the complication which resulted from the misunderstanding; but it was because she was unlike any other woman that he loved her, and he, with his wider experience, should have protected her innocent love of excitement, and prevented it from becoming the mistake which she had been incompetent to foresee.

What made defeat still more difficult to accept was his unconquerable conviction that in spite of her disclaimers her heart really did respond to his affection. He believed her sincere in her uncertainty, but while she held herself unable to accept his love, it was but natural that she should refuse to allow her own sentiment to be crystallized. "Oh! it is sweet to be loved!" she had murmured as she rested in his arms. What aggravation! A tired soul longing for affection and appreciation, and he so ready to give her both, yet denied the privilege!

As he had gradually broken away from his familiarity with Spencer, shortly after the disillusionment during his week-end visit at Beverly Farms, Auchester also separated himself from Vallie's boon companions. He had been long enough in America now to have made lasting friendships, and such friends, few in number but valued, invited him to their homes, making him less dependent upon the clubs. To them, as to Cunningham, he disclosed his name and position, but his confidence was respected. He accepted Cunningham's suggestion to become better acquainted as a matter of principle at first, for he was determined not to allow himself to rest under any misapprehension in the lawyer's mind; but in doing this both men came to admire and respect each other. He followed the Montgomery trial with a less passionate interest and, therefore, with clearer understanding than most of the spectators.

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In this way he saw Cunningham in action, and was amazed by the contrast between the man's character as manifested in his every-day life among his friends and the new exposition of him in his professional capacity. He was one of the few who was not swayed by Cunningham's argument, masterly as he admitted it to be. He did not claim that Montgomery was necessarily innocent, but he felt strongly that the lawyer's experiment in psychology was inconclusive. Auchester had been present at trials in France where demonstrations of psychological criminology were frequent, and had seen phenomenology applied even more dramatically than in the case just ended. He believed in it as a method of detecting crime, but in the Montgomery case he was convinced that the jury as well as the spectators were swayed by Cunningham's evident conviction and by the dramatic incident itself rather than by anything it disclosed. He promised himself the pleasure of discussing the matter sometime with him, when a sufficient interval had elapsed to prevent his difference in opinion from seeming to be criticism.

In the meanwhile Spencer came to the Badminton Club, to remain an indefinite period, so Auchester heard it rumored. What did this mean? Was it simply a continuation of the neglect which was the portion of his wife, or did the act possess a deeper significance? It was certain that he was unaware of the part the Captain had played in the Spicer episode, or that he was indifferent to it, for he met him with as much civility as he now manifested toward any one. Auchester dared not think of the second alternative, for it again raised in him that hope which he had sternly tried to kill. But if there should be anything to it—if Lucy should be freed from her present conventional bonds—No, the Captain assured

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himself; such happy coincidences never happen outside the story-book or off the stage.

His opportunity to discuss psychological criminology with Cunningham came about naturally after all, and sooner than he expected. It was, perhaps, a fortnight after the trial that the lawyer invited him to take luncheon with him, suggesting his office as their meeting-place. As Auchester entered he met Langdon on the point of leaving, and Cunningham, evidently deeply concerned with the subject they had been discussing, impulsively asked them both back into his private room.

"Langdon and I have been exchanging ideas," Cunningham said, "and I should like to get your opinion. I saw you at the trial many times, and a man of your temperament gains a different impression from that of nine-tenths of the spectators."

Cunningham had asked Langdon for this conference as soon as he felt himself equal to the discussion. The younger man's words at the close of the trial had been with him constantly, and when Margaret intimated that his own mental processes were such as to make him susceptible to over-subservience to an idea, he became obsessed with the fear that he had made a mistake. Freed from the heat of the argument and the surprise and disappointment of the verdict, Langdon regretted his remark, but the intervening time had not lessened his conviction. For more than an hour previous to Auchester's arrival they had discussed the question in a friendly way, and Cunningham had found his friend unwavering in his belief that a miscarriage of justice had resulted from the unusual presentation of the case on the part of the prosecution.

"Of course I don't question your sincerity, Ned, and

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I'm ashamed of myself that I allowed my feelings to get the better of me when I spoke to you that day. I have no excuse for it whatever. But I am even more certain than ever that the woman did the shooting and that Montgomery is shielding her. I believe that your construction of the case was absolutely correct except that the principals should change places: the woman shot Brewster and Montgomery was wounded in struggling with her to gain possession of the revolver. I'll prove that if we get a new trial."

Langdon's quiet confidence had its effect upon the older man. "You still think it was my 'uncanny power,' do you, Tom?"

"Frankly, yes," was the uncompromising yet friendly answer; "but as you once said, I realize that this power comes from your own conviction that you are right."

"Do you remember what else I said that day?" Cunningham asked; "that if through that power, as you call it, I ever accomplished an injustice to a prisoner, I should never forgive myself?"

"Yes, I remember it perfectly; but as long as you remain convinced that you are right, you can't feel that you have accomplished an injustice."

"I think you'll get a re-trial, Tom," Cunningham replied. "I do feel that I'm right, but I intend to put myself through a rigid examination before I'm done with it."

So they had left the matter when they ran into Auchester in the outer office. When they were seated, Cunningham stated the question clearly to him, and waited eagerly for his answer.

"I shall be much influenced by your opinion," he said.

The Captain tugged at his mustache as he always did

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when placed in a crucial position. "You want me to say exactly what I think, I suppose?"

"Exactly," Cunningham replied with emphasis. "There are no personalities in this."

"Well," Auchester said deliberately, "I agree entirely with Mr. Langdon."

"You do!" Ned exclaimed. "You think the psychological test a failure?"

"On the contrary; it was by means of that test that I arrived at my conclusion."

"Then how can you agree with Langdon?"

"You watched the man; I watched the woman."

Both men followed his words with excited interest, Langdon showing satisfaction, Cunningham the deepest concern.

"You watched the woman?" Ned repeated. "What did you observe?"

"The same phenomenon which you found in Montgomery: she clenched her hand every time Brewster's name was mentioned."

"Don't you see, Ned?" Langdon broke in. "You approached the case with a preconceived idea that Montgomery was guilty; if you had happened to settle upon the woman, the same test and the same argument would have convicted her."

"On the basis of the experiment and what jointly we all saw, it would appear that both are guilty," Cunningham said, meditatively.

"They may be," Auchester admitted; "but the woman struck me as being more likely to do the shooting in a moment of rage than the man to premeditate deliberate murder. Of course that doesn't go in law, but you asked my opinion."

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"You have given me quite a shock, both of you," Cunningham remarked. "We'll speak of this again, Tom. Now the Captain is going to cheer me up at luncheon. Won't you join us?"

"Thanks, no; I have an appointment at the Exchange Club."

"That's where we're going. We'll walk along together."

Auchester was surprised to find that his host had engaged a private dining-room, as there appeared to be no reason for seclusion. The conversation ran along general lines, touching on the topics in which they both were interested. Cunningham had thrown off the concern he manifested at his office, and the Captain found him the best of good company.

After the coffee had been served and the cigars lighted, Cunningham pushed his chair back from the table and crossed his legs. Auchester watched his face curiously, for it was evident that he was about to say something of importance. Ned's friends had learned to associate certain personal acts and gestures with corresponding mental processes, and the Captain had become more or less familiar with them.

"Today," Cunningham said at length, "I propose to perform an act of restitution. Last summer I did you an injustice, and I also did an injustice to a certain woman whom we both admire, though, perhaps I should add, in a different way. The fact that I thought it necessary to rush in upon you that night at 'Spicer's' was an affront to you both, and I have heartily regretted it. Now let me ask you a question: Has Spencer ever made any reference to it?"

"None whatever," Auchester replied. "He has had

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every chance, for lately I've seen him almost daily at the club."

"Has he recognized you?"

"Certainly; he's been quite civil."

"Then it was all bluff, as I suspected," Cunningham continued. Then he leaned across the table. "Do you know, Auchester, that that little whelp actually threatened Lucy to bring suit for divorce, naming you as correspondent?"

"The devil!" Auchester exclaimed, thoroughly aroused. "Why haven't I been advised of it?"

"I only knew about it the night after the trial. Lucy came to my house and poured out the whole story. Poor little girl! he has made her life a pitiful spectacle."

"But that was a fortnight ago. What has happened since? Surely I have a right to defend myself — and her."

"There is no occasion for any defense, my dear fellow, and that is where I perform my act of restitution. For certain reasons which we need not go into, I have shown Spencer reasons why he should abandon his intention, if he ever had one, and the incident is closed."

"But he couldn't have made that grounds for divorce."

"As a matter of fact, it is Lucy who has the grounds," Cunningham replied. "His threat was merely a bluff to frighten her, but he seemed determined to pull it off, 'simply to injure the man's reputation,' as he expressed it."

Auchester relapsed into silence. "I'm not sure that I should not have preferred to take a hand in this myself," he said, showing plainly that he was perfectly sure.

"You can employ your time to better advantage," Cunningham said, becoming almost jocose. Match-making was a new rôle for him to play, and he did it rather

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clumsily. "Spencer sails for Europe next week," he continued. "He will be absent some length of time. At the expiration of the legal limitation Lucy will sue for divorce on the grounds of desertion. Do you think you could have handled this matter any better yourself?"

The situation gradually cleared for Auchester. Cunningham leaned back in his chair, puffing good-naturedly at his cigar, and enjoying the changing expressions on his companion's face.

"By Jove!" the Captain exclaimed, a broad smile appearing at last. "That will leave her free!"

"You told me once that you never abandoned anything you undertook, but that sometimes you have had to wait. Is your patience still equal to the test?"

But Auchester appeared to be absorbed in his own thoughts. The smile still lingered, and whatever may have been upon his mind seemed all-sufficient. "By Jove!" he repeated at length, — "by Jove!"

XXXIII

NOVEMBER found "the season" starting in with full swing. Lucy's new life was slowly reconstructing itself within as well as without. When she left the Cunninghams' house that evening the only thing which seemed clear was that the awful dread which had oppressed her had been miraculously lifted from her heart. At the moment the how or the why signified nothing so long as the specter had disappeared. On her return home her first thought was to go to the children's room, where Larry and Babs were peacefully dreaming. She turned on the night lamp and stood at the foot of the tiny twin beds, listening to the quiet, regular breathing, gazing at the calm, sweet features reflecting back at her the innocence of childhood. These were her children, her own flesh and blood, and they were to be hers forever! A lump came in her throat, tears welled up in her eyes, but they were tears of thanksgiving. Sight alone did not satisfy, — she must feel the touch of their warm flesh against her own. She sank on her knees between the two beds, brushed back the golden locks which partially concealed Babs' face, and covered the soft cheek with kisses. Then she turned to the other bed and looked at Larry's sturdy features. Her boy! what had the future in store for him? Could it be possible that a man such as Vallie was ever a

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sweet, innocent child like this! What would her boy grow to be! Would he be a lawyer like Ned, or — she buried her face in the pillow beside him — or would he be a soldier like Auchester? No, not a soldier, she decided, for that would lead him into danger, and she could not endure that; but still a *man* — like Auchester. For a long time she rested her cheek against his, assimilating in part his peaceful calm, accepting in part his quiet contentment which demanded no explanation. She rose with a new strength, for the Voice of which Margaret had told her had spoken again, and this time she had heard and understood!

Margaret came in the next day. Together they had passed through the agonies of suspense, together they would rejoice in the emancipation. Lucy listened eagerly to the explanation of Cunningham's mysterious influence over Spencer, of which Margaret had learned the night before. A blush of shame came to her cheek at this evidence of Vallie's further degradation; yet why should she feel it more than the countless other humiliations she had endured? She could not know that the chemistry of the spirit was still at work within her, completing its labor of crystallization now that it found no opposition; she could not know that in that blush of shame she spoke now for her children as well as for herself.

"Ned has not the slightest idea that he was in any way involved," Margaret told her; "and he is taking much satisfaction in the thought that in saving Captain Auchester he has atoned for his previous distrust."

"Need he ever know?" Lucy asked. "What would be gained?"

"Sometime he must know it," she replied, "but not now. Sometime he must be made to realize that it is not

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safe to keep one's eyes only on the goal ahead. The path may contain pitfalls."

"It was all my fault," Lucy insisted. "He deserves to escape, but I am getting off all too easily."

Margaret looked tenderly at the thin face and the hollow eyes which the anxious days had left behind. "You have paid your price, my dear, you have paid your price."

Unexpectedly, and seemingly incongruously, Margaret broke the silence which followed her last remark with a light laugh. "I was thinking of Ned," she said in answer to Lucy's questioning look. "Now that the danger is past we can afford to smile; and his satisfaction over the whole affair is grotesque to us who know the facts. He is like that Indian prince in the Hindoo legend — perhaps you remember it — who was determined to see his lady-love. He was warned that the way was beset with dangers, but he would not be deterred. He came to the river Ganges, which they had told him was impassable, but he found a spot where he could walk across, dry-shod; they told him that the valley he must pass through was full of hidden terrors, but he found it lighted by the moon's reflection on white substances beneath his feet; they told him that the ravine which he must cross was guarded by the enemy, but he found a bridge over which he passed with ease; they told him that when he came to the princess' palace he could not reach her window, but there he found a rope by means of which he attained the object of his quest. Then he turned toward home. The glamour which had spread itself over all had vanished, and he found that the path on which he had crossed the Ganges was made up of corpses; that the white substances which had reflected the moon's light in the valley were the bleached bones of those who had entered it before;

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that the bridge across the ravine was formed by the crossed knives of the soldiers; that what he had thought to be a rope was in reality a deadly cobra. His eyes, like Ned's, were fixed only upon his goal; he, like Ned, could not see the dangers in his path."

"That is like Ned," Lucy smiled; "but after all, what a relief to see one man out of the thousand whose first thought is to respond rather than to make sure that the ground is firm beneath his feet. You should be very proud of him, Peggy."

"I am proud, even though anxious at times. He gets that trait from his Puritan ancestors; but in those days they hoped there might be hidden pitfalls so that they could become Christian martyrs. Times have changed since then. One isn't canonized nowadays for falling into a manhole or the subway. — Now, one other thing, my dear. We have taken the Leslies' box at the Opera for Monday nights, and we want you to go with us for the opening performance. It's the twenty-fifth, you know."

"I'd love to go," Lucy exclaimed. "By that time I shall have dispensed with these dark lines beneath my eyes; and, thank Heaven! one doesn't have to wear black for an approaching divorce!"

"And Lucy," Margaret went on, "Ned would like to have me ask Captain Auchester. Would it be unpleasant for you? The Brookses will be the other two."

"Would it be unpleasant?" she repeated, with just a touch of color showing in her pale face. "Why, no; I'd be glad to see him again." Then her hesitation vanished. "Of course I'd be glad to see him again."

"Splendid! That makes our party complete. We'll have a short little dinner at six-thirty sharp; the curtain rises at eight."

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Even with his business affairs entirely settled, Auchester found reasons for postponing his return to England. After his luncheon with Cunningham several important changes took place in his previously arranged plans, and for a man who ordinarily resented outside interference he accepted Ned's friendly offices with singular good-nature. When the dinner and box party for the opening night of the Opera was suggested, together with a sly intimation from Ned that Lucy would be of it, he demurred until he learned that she had already been consulted. If she still cherished against him the liberties he took at 'Spicer's' she would not now voluntarily place herself in a position which could but reopen their previous acquaintance, and knowing as she did that his sentiments had long since passed the bounds of friendship, her acceptance showed that she did not seriously object to him. These thoughts, together with others along the same line, gave the Captain much satisfaction, and he viewed the approach of the opening of the Opera season with an anticipation not wholly due to his love of music.

Lucy, too, found herself concerned with more than her interest in the particular opera selected to start music-mad Boston off into another season of intellectual debauch. It may have been a coincidence that in ordering her new gown she should have determined upon white, or it may have been that she remembered a remark which Auchester had once made to the effect that white became her best. That was what she had worn on the eventful evening at "Spicer's," and she would wear it again if only to show him that with it she associated no unhappy memories. He had probably forgotten her by this time; no man thoroughly consumed with love would have stayed away all these weeks simply because his letter

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had remained unanswered! But the Captain differed from other men. He had imagination enough in some ways, but when it came to aught which had to do with women she knew that his sense of gallantry would cause him to accept their words with literal exactness. What could he have seen in her? Had he really spoken those words which she seemed to recall with such heavenly vividness, yet which were clothed with no reality? She could never make him or any other man happy; she was too inconsequential and too irresponsible to satisfy any one after the glamour of first companionship passed into that analytical period which displays everything in the pitiless light of truth. It was a further act of folly, she told herself, to have Auchester so much in her mind, for by this time he had undoubtedly reached that period, and rejoiced that circumstances had preserved him. Still she did not chide herself when she found her thoughts running along forbidden paths.

In spite of Margaret's warning, Lucy was the last to arrive for dinner. She was not too late, being guilty only of that gentile tardiness which makes the entrance of a beautiful woman into a reception room one of the events of the occasion. It had been so long since she had given herself up to the enjoyment of an evening such as this that she felt almost diffident as she paused a brief moment in the doorway before greeting her hostess. Then the joy of it possessed her and she was herself again. No one who did not know would have believed that suffering could ever have found shelter behind that smiling, contented face; no one who did not know would have recognized in the quiet, attractive dignity of pose the one-time restless spirit which had set out upon its quest for happiness unmindful that the world is what it is, and had returned

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to its haven chastened and refined by the fire through which it passed.

The entire evening was unreal to Lucy, forming a climax to the dream-world in which she now lived. Auchester took her out to dinner, and their conversation was as natural as if they were casual acquaintances. How could it be possible, when together they had sipped the cup of forgetfulness, and but for the awakening of an untried sense would together have drained it to the dregs! Cunningham was in the rarest spirits and Margaret reflected the glow of his satisfaction. The Brookses, just home from Germany, contributed interesting sidelights on Max Rheinhardt's triumphs, and of the probable results of his influence, from which the conversation naturally turned upon the new scenic effects to be tried at the Opera House; they spoke of the regrets of the German people that America had wrested from them their beloved conductor for the Boston Symphony. The Captain showed an astonishing fund of knowledge upon these as on every subject, and the discussion formed a brilliant prelude for the evening to follow.

Lucy was but dimly conscious of the break in the moving of events as they rose from the table and later put on their wraps, yet she was keenly alive to the touch of Auchester's hand as he assisted her into the limousine. The long line of motors, awaiting their turn to discharge their aristocratic freights, the glare of the lights, the mob of handsomely gowned women and well-groomed men in the foyer, — all made their impression, but it might have been a picture she was looking at instead of a living reality. What did seem real was the meeting at the door with the Channings, the expression on "Medusa's" face as her eyes quickly sought and found Cunningham, and the curious change

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which took place when the next glance showed Lucy and Margaret close together. They moved on through the doors and to the Cunninghams' box in the upper tier, which the trim maid unlocked for them to enter. Gradually the chaos became order, the lights were lowered, the conductor struck his baton authoritatively against the desk in front of him, the strings softly drew the tangible from out the intangible, followed quickly by the 'cellos and the basses as the brief overture of "Madama Butterfly" seized the audience in its grip. Then the curtain rose: in front of it, pride of birth and of possession; behind, song-birds whose golden notes represented the fortunes of the Incas, — the apotheosis of human luxury!

All still the dream! Lucy had heard this opera many times, but tonight the music came to her with a new meaning, and she listened to it with sensations she had not before experienced. At other times the tense little Butterfly had amused her. How absurd to think that she could love and suffer as the clever librettist portrayed her! Now Lucy found that she was living her tragedy with her. It was not the Oriental but the woman whom she saw before her, and her sympathy went out to her with such definite sincerity that the intensifying passion of the music sank into her heart with a force which caused her pain. And when the last act came, and the neglected wife changed into the self-sacrificing mother, it was not a mimic reproduction of life which she saw enacted before her; it was life itself. Why had it never before brought tears to her eyes? Why had the opera never before touched her heart?

It might have been the art of the singer; but she had heard it well sung before. It was true that in the long reaches of the love-duet there was a richness in the beauty of the sustained song, that the music of the strewing of

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the flowers was no more lovely than the tones of the singer's voice, that the short phrases with which the music of the opera teems became on her lips the voice of a clarinet. Amsden would have told her that Puccini's later music-dramas are fabrics of orchestral and vocal interjection, designed to excite the nerves of those who listen as they watch the tense action on the stage. But Lucy did not wish it analyzed. She and Cio-Cio-San were one throughout the transitions of emotion. She felt rather than heard the gladness of the first act, the wistful, patient longing of the second, and the desolation of the third. But, most astonishing of all, she needed no analysis; she knew that it was that same Voice, still speaking, which now made it real!

During the interval in which they promenaded, Auchester told her that he was soon to return home, and asked if he might call to say "goodbye". She had not thought of his leaving Boston, yet of course it was natural that this should happen. Of a certainty she would be glad to see him, and sorry indeed that the time of parting was so near at hand. The performance came to an end, the merry party found its way again to the entrance, discussing the merits of the singers and the brilliancy of the *première*. The motor separated itself from the throbbing mass of machines, and swiftly passed on to the different homes, where the party gradually became disintegrated.

Lucy found herself at length in her own room, alone; and then the dream-world gave up its uncertainty and life became real. She had seen him again, and she felt the strength and courage of his personality pass into her own spirit, which she no longer trusted. He would come to her the following afternoon to say "goodbye".

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Was it to be a last farewell, or would she sometime see him again, and —

The maid found her strangely *distracted* as she assisted her in preparing for the night. Lucy was eager to be rid of all human companionship, that she might give herself up to the thoughts which crowded upon each other in her mind. At last she threw herself upon the bed and turned out the light, welcoming the darkness as a confederate to aid her as she surreptitiously drew her mental picture. And in this picture she saw herself again in the little dining-room at "Spicer's," listening to a man's story of his devotion, and the woman made reply, "Oh! it is sweet to be loved, it is so sweet to be loved!"

AMSDEN and Cunningham arranged the final details with Spencer, so that Lucy might be spared the disagreeable necessity of seeing him again. Against her lawyer's advice, the settlement, conditional only upon his carrying out his agreement, was too generous; but she gloried in this only opportunity left for self-penalization. There was still enough remaining to insure comfort for herself and the children, so the sacrifice was really not so serious as she imagined, and Amsden was satisfied that the moral effect upon her was worth the price it cost. Spencer was agreeably surprised, and sailed for Europe with less iron in his soul than would otherwise have been the case; so the final break was made with a minimum shock to all concerned.

The old man was scarcely less relieved than Lucy when he heard from her that her husband had been forced into an agreement. She could give him only a hazy idea of what had occurred, so he talked matters over with Cunningham, and learned from him the whole story.

"It goes against my grain to force a man to do the right thing by means of a threat," Cunningham told him, "but if ever there was an end which justified the means, this is it. Lucy is as innocent as an unborn babe, and Auchester is the soul of honor; it would have been a

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rough deal to have had a scandal come out of their foolish escapade."

"Auchester?" queried Amsden. "Did you think it was Auchester Mr. Spencer was trying to reach?"

"Of course it was Auchester." Cunningham showed his surprise. "Lucy must have told you. Who else could it be?"

"Why — frankly —" the old man stumbled, "I understood that it was you."

Cunningham regarded him as if he had suddenly lost his mind. "You understood that Spencer was to name me as correspondent?" he demanded, speaking slowly.

"There is no question whatever about it," Amsden replied firmly, with equal doubts as to the other man's sanity. "That was what almost drove Lucy to distraction."

"How perfectly ridiculous!" he replied; but the assurance which was ever with him had disappeared.

"I'm surprised that Lucy did not tell you," the old man went on, fearing lest he be criticized professionally. "It was understood that she would do so as soon as the trial was over. As Spencer had not served his papers I thought it wise not to divert you needlessly."

"She came to tell me," Cunningham hastened to exonerate her. "She came the night after the trial ended, — and I wouldn't let her tell me."

"I am surprised that you could keep her from it," Amsden said. "Her one thought has been to protect you from the results of her own folly. She would have given her husband her entire estate, but when it came to relinquishing one of the children, she stood up and fought."

"God bless her for that!" he returned. "I could not respect her as I do if she had yielded that."

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Amsden saw by Cunningham's manner that the news he had given him had produced a tremendous shock. His whole attitude had changed, and it was with difficulty that he kept his mind upon the subject before them. At its conclusion the old man expressed his regrets that he should have been the one to acquaint him with the unpleasant facts.

"It hits me a good deal harder than you imagine," he replied, with much feeling. "A man can perhaps take a certain amount of satisfaction in being a knave, but precious little in being shown up an ass. Now you can do me one more favor. Will you meet me at Lucy's house this afternoon?"

"With pleasure. At what hour?"

"Four o'clock."

"I shall be there at that time," Amsden said, wonderingly, as he took his departure.

So it happened that Lucy received a larger company than she had looked for on that afternoon which followed the Opera party with the Cunninghams. Margaret arrived first and found Lucy in the midst of her toilette.

"I don't know why I'm here, but Ned telephoned me. He and Mr. Amsden are coming at four," she said by way of explanation.

"Four?" Lucy queried, looking at the clock apprehensively. "Why, it's nearly that now. Well, I won't keep them waiting long."

Mr. Amsden was walking up the steps when Cunningham alighted from a motor cab, such being the punctuality of the two men, and they entered the house together. Margaret explained Lucy's delay and tried to keep up the conversation, but her husband was entirely absorbed. It was a relief when Lucy at last entered the room.

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"I am so glad to see you," she greeted them with a happy smile. "It isn't as gay as it was the last time you were here, Ned, but you're just that much safer!" She could not resist the temptation to be mischievous. "You aren't afraid of me now, are you, Ned?"

But he was in no mood for bantering. "This is my party today, Lucy," he said meaningly. "I've asked Margaret and Mr. Amsden to be here so that I can tell you all at once that the scales have been lifted from my eyes, and that at last I see myself as I must always have appeared to others."

As they wondered at the significance of his unexpected words, Auchester was announced.

"Ask him to wait in the reception room," Lucy told the butler.

"No," Cunningham corrected; "please have him come up here. He is needed to make this complete."

Still wondering, Lucy complied with his request.

"Auchester," he said, scarcely giving him time for greetings, "I was just telling these friends here, among whom you are included, that at last I have learned what an arrant cad I've been — always, I suspect. First of all, I've tried to show Lucy how she ought to live, and you know what a failure I've made of that; then I undertook to tell you the proper code for a gentleman to observe, and you've taught me by that patient indulgence which is a part of your natural manhood a lesson which I shall never forget; I ridiculed Margaret when she did her best to show me that I was guilty of far greater disregard of conventions than Lucy ever thought of, and now I learn that while I thought I was protecting you, I was only saving my own skin."

"You know, then!" both women exclaimed together.

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"Yes; Amsden told me, supposing of course that I knew it all the time. I've tried to run the universe, and considered myself the only one competent to do it. Don't you see, Peggy?" he added, turning to his wife, "this was another instance of insane adherence to a preconceived idea, such as I spoke to you about the other night. I knew that Lucy and the Captain were together there, and nothing could drive it into my head that I was in any way included. You and Lucy tried to tell me, but I wouldn't listen. Then I took it upon myself to instruct Langdon in the ethics of the law, but in my own practice I was again blinded by a preconceived idea. Through this I may have jeopardized an innocent man's life, but, thank God! it is not too late to rectify that mistake."

He paused for a moment after his fierce self-arraignment, during which his bitterness frightened those who heard it. Margaret with difficulty restrained herself from checking him; but knowing him so well she realized that to a conscience such as his this castigation was the saving clause. Uncompromising in meeting mistakes in others, he was pitiless when he found himself offending.

"Now, my friends," he continued, "you know me for what I am, and, what is more important, I know myself. You will be generous, but that only makes my responsibility the greater."

Cunningham's words were so affecting that no one tried to make reply. When he concluded there was a tense silence, which he himself was the first to break. He surprised every one by the sudden change in voice and manner.

"Lucy," he said, so tenderly that it almost brought the tears which were already near the surface, "I thank you

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from the bottom of my heart for the sacrifices you tried to make for me. I wasn't worth it, for I acted like a fool; but I'm glad you did it, for Margaret's sake. Auchester," he continued, holding out his hand, "I hope I may always claim your friendship."

The Captain grasped the extended hand with warm cordiality. "Only on condition that we divide the blame and place it where it belongs," he said. "Whatever this experience may have taught you, Cunningham, I have learned from it that my code and the one I've tried to persuade Mrs. Spencer to adopt is not as sound as I once considered it."

"Peggy," Cunningham said, "come home, and let me tell you what I have to say to you where no one else can hear."

As they turned toward the door Lucy placed her hand on Ned's arm. "You are still trying to shoulder my load," she said. "I can't say the right thing now, but I told you once just why I loved you, and my ideas haven't changed a bit since then. I have been the moth, dazzled by the light and hovering about the flame. Now I stand on the threshold, appalled by the possibilities you have taught me to see, and wondering if I can discover their meaning. But you have done your part."

When Amsden said "goodbye" she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, causing the old man untold embarrassment but inward joy. "Without you I could never have had courage or strength to pass through these bitter experiences," she said. "I can never thank you enough, but I'm sure my father knows and blesses you for what you've done."

Then Lucy and Auchester were left alone. "Well," she said to him as they seated themselves, "we have

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managed to stir up a little unpleasantness for you after all! Do you remember that when you first dined with us, and spoke of your fighting blood, I suggested it?"

"I remember every word you have ever said to me," he replied. "The same fighting blood is in me now, and I've come to you today ready to fight the greatest battle of my life for the highest stake in the world."

She could not misunderstand his words this time, and she made no attempt to avoid the issue. She had known since the night before that this moment would come, and she had made her decision.

"I must sail on Saturday," he said. "May I not take with me your promise to be my wife? I realize now that we must wait for the legal formalities, but your promise will make that waiting possible."

She looked at him with infinite tenderness. "It would be so easy for me to answer — 'yes'."

"Then you will —" He started forward eagerly, but she interrupted him.

"No, Malcolm; I cannot give you that promise."

"You cannot?" he exclaimed, drawing back.

"Not yet, — but if you are content to wait —"

"We must wait, of course," he answered, not comprehending. "All I ask for now is your promise."

"But that is what I dare not give. Don't misunderstand me," she added quickly, noting his expression. "If I gave you that promise now, it would be simply because my heart is so hungry for the love you offer me. That would not be fair to you, and I could not accept it. All these years I have lived a life wrapped up wholly in myself. My husband has meant nothing to me; it is only recently that I have learned to know

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my children, — I am not sure even now that I know myself. It would be so easy for me to answer 'yes'. Don't you understand?"

"I am content to take that risk," he replied.

"But I am not. I love you, Malcolm, and I'm proud to tell you so; but it is a love which has not yet been tested. How do I know that it is real, that it is other than the hope that love will come. It seems real now, and it is a struggle not to yield to it."

"Why should you struggle? Why should you not yield?" he demanded with man's impatience.

"The love itself is why," she answered simply. "Had I been free when you asked me before I should not have hesitated. Today, loving you, I realize what it means. You are prepared to give much to your wife; in return she should be able to give you an equal portion. I believe that all will be as you wish if you will let me have time to test myself, but I cannot make you that promise now. Let me forget the woman I was and learn to know the woman I am or can become."

Auchester found it difficult to accept the situation. Just when the cup seemed at his lips, she dashed it away for what seemed to him no real reason, but simply because of baseless doubts. Of course he could be patient, but what might not intervene!

"You forget how many years I have already waited for you," he said. "I was waiting before I knew you, — before I knew for what I was waiting."

"Since it has been so long surely a little longer will not matter," she urged, smiling sweetly, — "if you really want me."

"If I really want you!" he exclaimed, all the unexpressed longing of the past, all the pent-up emotion of

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the present crowding itself into his words. "It is because I want you so desperately that I cannot bring myself to take even the slightest risk of losing you."

"Let me have the sweet thought of becoming your wife to keep me constant in my effort to make myself equal to that joy," she pleaded.

"Too great perfection in the wife imposes impossible conditions on the husband."

"It won't be perfect enough for that," she laughed; but you told me that you became more demanding as you grew older, — and you'll be just that much older then."

"You are a feminine Tantalus!" he cried.

"'Woman is the soldier's aggravation,'" she quoted.

"You remember my words so well that I shan't dare speak —"

"Don't speak;" she interrupted quickly, — "only wait!"



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